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ETC. ETC.

# THE FORMER DAYS

*By*

NORMAN MACLEAN



"Say not thou, What is the cause that the former days were better than these? for thou dost not enquire wisely concerning this."



HODDER AND STOUGHTON  
LIMITED LONDON

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To  
The Honoured Memory  
of

The Sons and Grandson of LORD MACDONALD,  
who died for King and Country:

ARCHIBALD, who was killed on the march to  
Bloemfontein in the Boer War.

GODFREY, who was killed in the First Great War  
and who lies in an unknown grave at Loos.

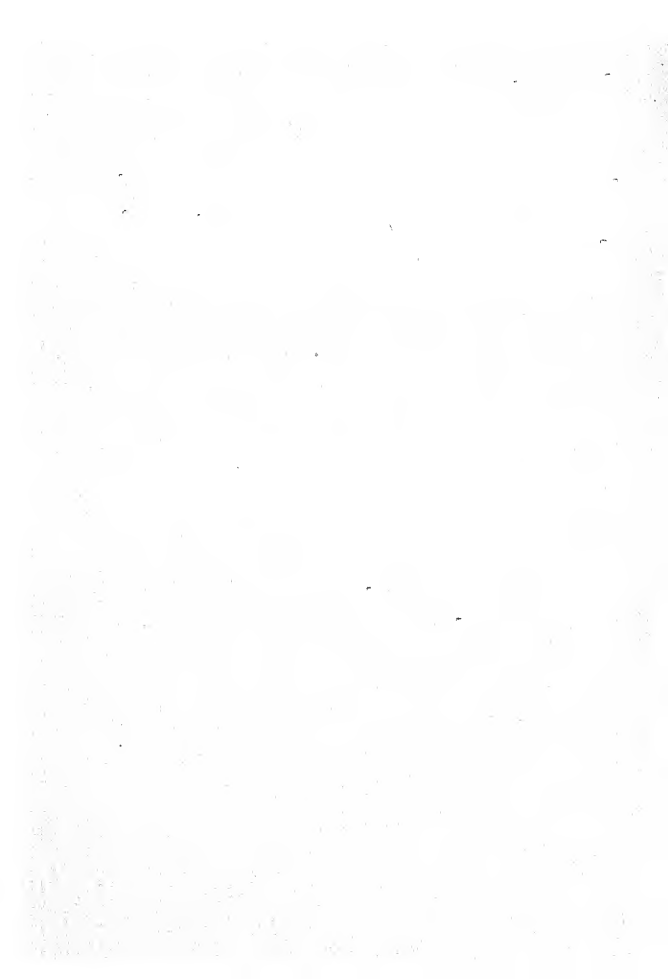
RONALD, who died in France, in the First Great War  
whose grave is in Cherbourg.

and

HAMISH, the son of Godfrey, who was killed in the Second  
Great War, and in whose unknown grave at El Alamein  
the hopes of many lie buried.

“ They went forth to the wars and They always fell.”

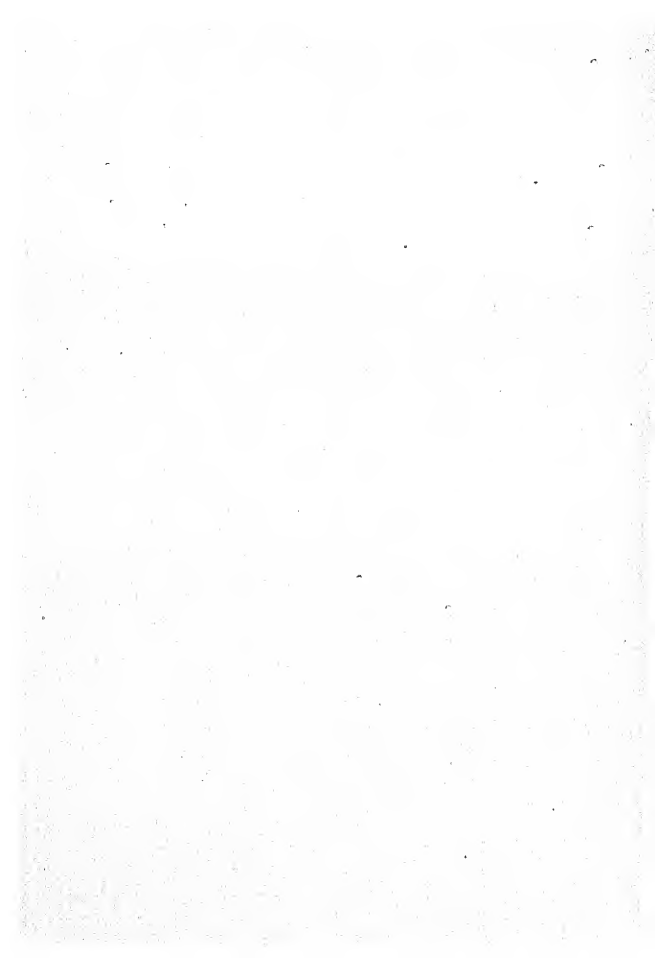




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## I

## THE CAVE

## § I

IT WAS CALLED THE OTTER'S CAVE, and my first recollection of it was being taken there by my father when he set a trap to catch an otter. Not long ago I read a story in some newspaper of a game-keeper who had seen an advertisement offering one pound each for otters' skins, and who set traps and caught two otters, and sent the skins to the address in London. "These two pounds will be very useful for winter stores," he told his wife, and kept on saying so for a week; but no letter came from London. After the week had gone the keeper met the postman a quarter of a mile from the house, so disturbed was he, but the postman only shook his head. Then an idea came in the night, and in the morning the keeper went to the little post office where Widow MacMurray learned all the local history from the messages that came and went. There weren't many, consequently the more meaning was deducted from each. And when the keeper handed in a telegram for London bearing the words: "Caught a golden eagle. Shall I send it dead or alive?" the widow was full of excitement. "Where, Roderick, did you catch the golden eagle? None was seen here for years. This is a great event! catching a golden eagle!" Thus twittered she behind the counter. But Roderick's face was like a rock—immovable and expressionless. "The Queen's telegraph offices are the most secretive places in the Empire," said he. "Anybody who whispers abroad what passes in a telegram goes to prison. I wonder at you, Effie, asking questions about a telegram." Thereupon a sudden silence fell. Three hours later Roderick received an answer: "Cheque forwarded; send eagle alive." And two days later Roderick got his two pounds and immediately sent back a receipt with a message below his signature: "*Golden eagle flew away.*" Our islanders love no tale so much as a tale that makes them feel that they themselves are cleverer than the hard-faced people far to the South who know not that blessed language which Adam spoke to Eve in the Garden of Eden.

My father had doubtless seen a similar advertisement and he thought it would be quite simple to catch an otter in like manner, more especially as two otters were seen playing in the bay. So out of the barn he brought an old iron trap. It had hung on a rafter undisturbed for years. And I asked permission to accompany him. For I was full of curiosity as to how that rusty puckle of iron could possibly catch anything.

The cave was not far away. Our house stood a hundred yards or so back from the shore on the brae that sloped slowly up to a hill called Ben Lee. Later that hill made history and figures largely in the social evolution of the Kingdom. But I shall come to that later. Meanwhile the story of the cave must suffice. The cave lay three hundred yards or so south-east from our house. The shore is much broken by the billows that come ever and anon hurling themselves against the rocks. One rock was worn into a dozen pinnacles and was flanked across a narrow shingle by a rock shaped like a sharp cone. Wherever the sea found a soft seam in the rocky girdle that guarded the Island, it slowly wore it down. So it came that jutting rocks and little bays alternated all along the shore. One or two of these shingly bays were cleared of the boulders and made into little coves which served the fishermen as ports for their boats. On that day there were three boats drawn up in the little port on the way to the cave. Today these boats have all vanished. For they needed strong men to pull them up. And when a township no longer musters six strong men, the silence of desolation falls on the shore. It is strange how gradually changes come. In those days I could count on an evening twenty-five to thirty boats sailing north through the Sound of Raasay to cast their nets. And a lovely sight it was with the sun gleaming on the brown sails. Now there is none to be seen on the Sound. And you hear people speaking with great complacency of how the world is improving and how material development will bring us at last to the golden age. I doubt it. If the golden age consists of an island inhabited by old men and women incapable of launching a boat or hoisting a sail, then the golden age is already come in this our Island. But I get more and more convinced that the golden age of the Island was in those days when I set out with my father to catch an otter with a trap that looked to me a miracle of invention.

The cave opened out to a platform of almost level rock; but a deep fissure was cut through the platform, along which the waves swept into the cave. The runway was deep, but so narrow that one could leap over it. And it was in this channel that my father set about fixing his trap.

"You see," he explained, "this is the only way the otter can get into the cave, and he cannot but step on the trap."

The trap was ingenious enough. If the lightest step touched its centre, the two claws closed with a snap and caught the victim's foot. With a stout cord the trap was made fast to a heavy boulder. Then it was lightly covered with yellow sea-ware so that it was invisible. "For otters are very clever," said my father, "and if they see a trap they will turn back or get round it."

He showed me, before he covered it so cunningly, how it worked. He touched it with a bit of driftwood and it closed with a vicious snap.

"The otter's foot will be broken," I said with a quiver.

"I don't know," replied my father, "but it will be held fast until I catch it."

"And what will happen then?"

"I will kill it," said he, "and sell the skin."

On the way back we saw two seals swimming off the shore. My father stood on a jutting rock and began to whistle. He was a good whistler; but not to be compared to Samuel the widow's son, who could whistle like every bird in the air. The seals turned and swam towards the shore. It was music to them.

Suddenly we heard a soft whistling coming from the stark conical rock, that trilled and gathered strength and soared like a lark.

"That's Samuel the widow's son," said I.

And we made our way to that rock, stepping carefully over the jagged boulders. And there, ensconced in a cleft, was Samuel, his rod waiting for a bite, and a dozen rock-fish and saith at his feet. There my father left me with him.

The rod suddenly dipped, and Samuel found that he had hooked a big fish. With patience and caution he manipulated the rod. At times the point would be deep in the water, but slowly, inch by inch, he would raise it again, while the fish splashed desperately. "We'll never land this fish up here," said Samuel, "but you climb down, and you'll find a niche just at sea-level where you can plant your feet, and I'll lead the fish to you and you'll catch it by the gills."

"I may fall in," I objected.

"Never mind; if you do, I'll fish you out," said Samuel, struggling to keep the rod up.

I climbed down very cautiously and found the projection, on which I precariously stood. Then Samuel began to lead the fish to my feet. At last he succeeded, and with a sudden lunge I got it by the gills and lifted it up.

"Aren't you the hero!" exclaimed Samuel, "and amn't I the clever fisherman!"

That ended the day's fishing. The large lythe that was the last was worth almost all the rest, and Samuel passed a string through a slit in the jaws of the small fish and gathered them into a bunch, and made a loop and slung them on his fist. And he carried the big fish in his other hand with a finger through the gills. "You carry the rod," said he to me.

As we made our way up the shingle I began to tell about the trap, for I was sore troubled. The seals looked on so trustingly and their round heads as they bobbed in the rippling sea seemed to dance a joyous measure. The otters were like that too: happy and trusting. I don't know quite what made me suddenly feel as if I were stabbed in the heart, and I could not restrain a gulp in my throat.

"What's the matter with you?" asked Samuel.

"It's the otters," I quavered. "They are going to be trapped. It's a shame." Then I told him what my father had done.

"We'll soon settle that," said Samuel. And he led the way to a boat that was drawn up in a little dry dock scooped out of a bank. He lifted the scuttle and deposited his fish below it. "That's to protect my fish from the seagulls. They are the thieves of the ocean."

Then Samuel, having satisfied himself that the Master was out of sight, led the way to the cave, running.

Very carefully he uncovered the trap at the bottom of the deep runnel.

"We must spring the trap," murmured Samuel; "there is no other way of saving the otter."

Then he fell silent for a little while, gazing at the trap. At last he spoke with decision:

"You look at the top of the beach and you will find somewhere a bit of dried tangle: bring it to me."

There was no difficulty about that. I was back in a minute with a foot-long tangle, hard and brittle. I found Samuel intently gazing at the trap.

"That's the very thing," he exclaimed, as he took the tangle in his hand. And with it he touched the spring, and the trap closed instantly.

"Norman, my hero," said he, "you remember the thrashing your father gave me with his gory tawse because I beat that softy, Murdo the son of Colin. Well, I have got my own back on the Master now."

Then out of some corner of his jacket, which was just a collection of rents and patches, he produced a knife and carefully cut away the

tangle from the trap, leaving no shred behind. And he replaced the sea-ware over it as before. Then, whistling gaily, he led the way to the boat, reclaimed his fish, put the rod over his shoulder, balancing it by the hand that held the lythe, and with the gad of fish in the other he set out up the brae for home.

"Norman, my hero," he called from the first ridge, "aren't we the clever ones!"

Next morning, before breakfast, my father went to the cave full of expectation that he would bring back an otter. But back he came with a blank face.

"Well, Kenneth," asked my mother as she was ladling out the hot porridge, "did you get an otter?"

"Not so," he answered, "but a strange thing has happened. The trap was covered up just as I left it. But it was sprung."

"Closed with nothing in it?" she exclaimed.

"Nothing to show how it closed," he replied.

"Ah well," remarked my mother, "that cave is the home of sprites of all sorts. No doubt they resented your interfering with their runway. It is not the part of a wise man to interfere with imps and spirits and such like. No good ever came of that. You had better just put the trap back in the barn."

And I saw my father, after school that evening, coming up the brae with the old trap slung over his shoulders. For though he had studied at the college in Glasgow and knew quite well that there were no ghosts or sprites or imps or fairies, yet he, at times, was visited by doubts and hesitations. He did not believe in them, but he was afraid of them. Better be at a safe distance from their haunts.

Perhaps it wasn't that altogether; for he was a man of sudden impulses but of inconstant will. He could not persevere nor keep long on one course. It was true to his texture that he should set a trap one day and carry it home the next.

"Aren't we the clever ones!" said Samuel, whispering at the long desk, finishing his arithmetic. "I paid off my score with the Master, and you have saved the otters."

## § 2

THAT was how the cave first got a hold of me, and various things thereafter conspired to inspire me with a consuming desire to explore the cave. To set out into the unknown and discover strange lands and stranger people is one of the primitive instincts of life. The spell that unknown Africa cast over David Livingstone was the same that the



cave cast over me. It was the mystery that enshrouded it which captivated me. I began to ask questions of everyone whom I deemed wise. "How far does the cave go in?" got for answer "Miles and miles." "Where does it end?"—"It never comes to an end: it comes out under the sea in the MacLeod country." "Where is the MacLeod country?"—"The west side of the Island." "And this side of the Island?"—"Oh! What a little dunce you are not to know where you are living. This is the Macdonald country. And the Macdonalds are the greatest of clans. The Chief of the Macdonalds was a King in the old, old days." "How did he stop being a King?" "Everything comes to an end," explained my mother, "even Kings: and a little boy's questions must come to an end now." "But you called me a dunce: what does that mean?" "Ask your father," she said briefly and with an air of finality that there was no gainsaying. So that night I asked my father: "What is a dunce?" He put down his pipe and stopped smoking, for the question seemed as if it startled him.

"You puzzle me with many questions," he answered, "but that word dunce has a story in itself. Long, long ago the cleverest man in all the world was a Scotsman who went over all the countries asking questions of the professors that they could not answer—just like the questions you ask yourself—while he could answer all their questions. His name was Duns Scotus. Then the new learning came, and Duns Scotus and his scholars refused to accept it and they held fast by the old learning and the old ways. The clever people of the new learning when anybody disagreed with them said, 'Oh, you are a Duns,' meaning a follower of Duns Scotus. In a little while 'You are a Duns' came to mean a stupid and ignorant person. So you see that the name of the cleverest man of his own day in all the world became at last 'dunce'—a word of contempt and ignorance and stupidity."

"Mother called me a dunce."

"The next time she calls you that, just remember that Duns Scotus was the most learned man in Europe in his day. And if you go on asking questions you will be no doubt another Duns Scotus."

"And what was the new learning that turned Duns into dunce?"

At that he began to cut a plug of tobacco with a knife that was encrusted with nicotine. He rolled the shredded tobacco on his palm, and put it into the bowl of his pipe tenderly as if he loved it. Then on the top he put the dottle which he had put on the settle beside him. Then with the tongs he lifted a red ember from the peat-fire and pressed it lightly on the dottle, and drew in the smoke and let it out in a thin ribbon which gradually spread in a little cloud. In a minute a look of perfect peace came over his face.

"The new learning always turns out to be just the old ignorance," said he between puffs at his pipe. "The new learning now is that instead of being made out of dust we were made out of monkeys. I don't mind which it was. Monkeys are better than mud. But, my hero, remember that the teachers of the new learning will be dunces in their turn."

"But, Father," said I, "do explain."

"Nobody can explain anything," he replied, "not even why a little boy makes a plague of himself asking questions. There was a wise man long ago, and he plagued everybody asking questions until at last they poisoned him. You be careful, my hero, that somebody doesn't put poison in your porridge some day. We would miss you if that happened."

"What was the name of the man they poisoned?"

"Socrates," he answered in tones so curt that I felt that silence was golden.

I soon found that it was useless to ask my father any questions about the cave. Ever after the sprites had sprung the trap he had set for the otters he shied away from it. But twenty years afterwards I read the *Phaedo* and the story of the death of Socrates in the prison off the market-place in Athens, and I put down the book and asked myself the question: "Where did I first hear his name?" And suddenly I remembered my father filling his tobacco-pipe, my mother calling me a dunce for asking questions about the cave; and a queer feeling crept over me that nothing ever comes to an end; for there in an island where Gaelic was the language everybody spoke! where English was only beginning to creep in; where Greek was a language long dead; there, three thousand years after he drank the hemlock with a jest about presenting a cock to Aesculapius, the name of Socrates was like a spell silencing a little boy. No, nothing ever ends. The new teachers who feel so infallible are transformed into dunces in time, but never into nothingness.

### § 3

BUT it was the old woman who lived alone in the little thatched house beyond the wall that shut in the cultivated slopes from the moor who ever and anon by her stories kept alive the longing to explore the cave. I am not quite sure what even her name was, for everybody called her Granny. The walls of her cot-house were built of undressed stones and clay, and they were so thick that the wind when it came rushing against them was diverted straight up to the sky. The thatch

was thus never touched by the gales. The heather ropes which held the thatch in place never broke. I read not long ago a pronouncement by a scientific professor that these thick-walled dwellings were built on the most scientific and practical principles. The new houses, thin-walled, with the roofs coming over the eaves, never pass a winter but tiles are stripped off by the gales. I did wish when I read that wise professor that Granny were alive so that I might explain to her that, when she spun her heather ropes and cut the rushes for thatch, and so planned her roof that the gales could not strip it, she was marching in the front line of scientific architecture. And inside, Granny's house befitted the outside. You gained admittance by pulling a string which lifted a wooden latch, and the door answered to the lightest push. There were no locks and no keys. A wooden bar made the door fast at night. On the flat stones set carefully in the centre of the room a peat-fire always burned brightly in the winter. There was a barrel, out of which both ends had been knocked, set in the roof above the fire, and the barrel sloped to the east away from the prevailing wind. It does sound very barbaric, a fire in the centre of the room, without a chimney, and very inimical to cleanliness, but you could not find in all the Island a cleaner house than old Granny's. She chose her peat-banks of the blackest shade; however wet the summer, she managed to have her peat dry as a bone. If the sun refused to shine and dry this year's peat, she made last year's peat dry this year's. For she had a way of always having a little barricade of damp peat half round her glowing embers, and when they were perfectly dry she stored them under her box-bed and replaced them by others. Thus in the severest of winters Granny always had a cosy and warm room. Of course, if it were coal she burned it would have been horrid. But peat-smoke is an aromatic disinfectant. The barrel sloping eastward was a perfect ventilator. And when the embers glowed on the hearth—and Granny seemed always to manage that the fire was a heap of red embers—it was the most perfect system of central heating that the world has seen.

I am not very clear as to Granny's history, for she was very old. If anybody asked her age she would say, "I shall never see eighty again." From all I could gather, her story was tragic. Her family and neighbours had joined in a mass emigration to Canada. She was in delicate health—for a baby was coming—and her young husband thought it wiser that she should follow when he had prepared the way. But the emigrant ship was lost at sea. Granny had a habit of sitting on a little knoll from which she could see all the roads winding along the shore—the roads by which travellers came and went. It was thus, in her youth, she watched for the return of her husband and her friends.

She refused to believe they were drowned. And there Granny would be seen from the road when the days were sunny, seated on the knoll, keeping her watch.

On that knoll was Granny's sofa. When she began to keep her vigil a neighbour, of whom I know nothing except that his name was Uisdean (Hugh), had a sudden inspiration. He was seen one morning working with a spade on the knoll. When he was asked what he was doing he replied, "I am making a sofa for Mary." There it is to this day. The greenest of turf upholstered the sofa. At the back of it, between it and the south-west wind, he planted black birch bushes. At one end of the sofa he placed a cushion of turf.

I have seen many lands, from the far north-west to the long wash of Australian seas, but nowhere did I see a more lovely view than Granny feasted her eyes on from her sofa on the knoll. On the Sound below her the sun shimmered and played on the dancing waves. Dun Can spread its high table and kept watch and ward over the island of Raasay where the Macleods so long held sway. To the north Ben Dianaveg raised its sharp summit to the clouds, and eastward Glamaig challenged the Coolins. I have sat there often and gazed until I felt the hills and the sea and the moors suddenly melt into a transparency through which an ineffable radiance poured in on the soul. Granny could neither read nor write, but I feel sure that seated on her sofa on many a summer eve she felt as on the Mount of Transfiguration.

Now as we sat in a circle round Granny's central heating, with our feet to the griosach,<sup>1</sup> Granny would tell her tales of ancient days. She spoke the most beautiful Gaelic, unpolluted by a single word of any foreign tongue. And she had a way of often making caves the stage for her stories.

One cave story Granny loved to tell was of the cave in the deep recesses of which the Feinn are waiting their restoration to the sunlight and the joys of battle.

"Who were the Feinn?" asked Samuel the widow's son, the first time we heard the story.

"The Feinn," answered Granny, "were the greatest fighters that ever lived. They were the warriors of Fionn who conquered Ireland and drove the enemy out of Scotland; and would have conquered the world if they had not been put under a spell."

"Who put a spell on them?" asked Samuel.

"Mererad Mhor na buidsichean (Big Margaret of the witchcraft). After a battle in which their enemies lay like the leaves in November, the Feinn entered a cave to rest and shelter. And there Mererad

<sup>1</sup> Red embers.

succeeded at last with her witchcraft. She put them asleep. But she put a magic horn on a shelf in the cave, and if anyone ever blew the magic horn three times they would wake up and go forth to battle again."

"Would it not be better for them to go on sleeping?" I asked.

"Oh, Ronald," she answered, "you have such queer thoughts. Better to go on sleeping! Perhaps it is so; for very sad things happen in the waking hours. And dreams are sometimes lovely. But it would be better for the Feinn to wake up, for they are most uncomfortable at the present moment."

"How is that, Granny?" asked Samuel, sitting motionless, with his ears and eyes deeply intent.

"It is this way," went on Granny. "A smuggler took refuge in the cave from a storm. The farther he went into the cave the drier and warmer it became. He reached the place where the magic horn lay on a flat rock. He lifted the horn, and by way of trial he blew a blast. And then he looked, and he saw, far as his eye could reach in a great vaulted chamber, the Feinn lying, and at the blast of the horn they opened their eyes.

"The smuggler thought it very strange and did not know what to do next. But when one is nervous one often repeats what he has been saying or doing. Whenever you hear anybody saying the same thing twice over, you know that they are getting nervous. So the smuggler repeated the blast on the horn; and at the sound the Feinn rose on their elbows.

"At that the smuggler took fright, and well he might, for they looked at him with eyes fierce and wild.

"'Mo Creach,' cried the smuggler and rushed back, barking his shins on the rocks, towards the mouth of the cave.

"'I never before knew the world was so beautiful,' thought the smuggler when he got out and saw the sun shining on the sea.

"Ever since, the Feinn are there in the cave on their elbows and they cannot rise."

And Granny got two dry peat and put them in the heart of the glowing embers on the hearth. We could hear the wind whistling round the cot-house and the dash of the rain on the panes set in the thatch. A wisp of blue smoke rose between us and Granny.

"How did the smuggler manage to see the Feinn in that deep cave so far from its mouth?"

"It is easy to ask questions and difficult to answer them," replied Granny. "My grandfather, who told me the story of the Feinn, never explained that."

"Was that the otter's cave?" asked Samuel suddenly, his eyes glinting with the flames of the kindling peat and with excitement.

"It is quite possible," she answered, "for the otter's cave is a very deep cave and nobody in the Island has ever been to its end. The Feinn may be there now, on their elbows, and very uncomfortable they must be."

In a moment Samuel was off his stool and stretched himself on the hard clay floor and lifted his body on his elbow.

After a few minutes he sat up and said, "It is the most difficult position possible for a man to be in. It is the greatest cruelty to leave them on their elbows. We must do something about it."

"Don't you worry about that," said Granny, "for when you are under a spell you feel nothing."

That was how Samuel and I came to make a solemn pact that we would make our way into the otter's cave, find the magic horn, and blow on it that third blast that would deliver the Feinn from their long bondage. It might be the task of years: to reach the magic horn and blow the blast that would deliver the Feinn who lay there on their elbows and could not rise, but we two would do it.

#### § 4

IT was difficult to do anything then, for the winter days were short and after school there was no daylight for exploring. And on Saturdays Samuel had to do such a lot of things: thresh the corn with the wooden flails; clean out the byre; bring peat down from the hill—the day was too short for all he had to do. But when the March winds had dried up the land, Samuel, on a Friday, came to me at the school play-hour and said, "What about the otter's cave?"

"What about it?" said I.

"It's time we began our search for the magic horn," he went on. "Tomorrow is Saturday and I shall get the peats home early, and when you hear me whistle twice from the waterfall you'll join me."

"Is there anything I can bring?" I asked.

"No, the first day we shall only consider the obstacles we have to overcome."

So on the morrow I waited for the whistle, and sure enough in the afternoon I heard it coming shrilly from the bottom of the waterfall where nobody could see him. And there I joined him, and as the tide was far out we made our way along the base of the broken cliff to the cave. In that short length of shore there is more variety than you can see anywhere. We passed over a bridge made by a huge rock that fell

from the cliff and came to rest on two barricades. When the tide came flowing in below the little bridge and lapped the lovely blue shingle in the curved little bay beyond, it was a beautiful sight. Nearer the open sea is the bath. This is a natural basin in the well-nigh level rock, some four feet deep, which is left full by the ebb. In the summer when the sun shines for hours on the sea-water in that pool, it is the pleasantest hot sea-water bath in the Island. The rock, in the crevices of which the crabs changed their shells each year, lay basking in the spring sun, inviting us to wade out to it. But we went straight to the otter's cave. And no sooner did we come to its entrance and look into its gloomy depths than I felt all enthusiasm for exploration exuding at every pore. It had, even at its entrance, that feeling of decay and death which meets one in ancient houses when the floors are rotting.

The opening to the cave was broad and high, but its sides narrowed and its roof lowered as it went in. Owing to the fissure along which the waves, driven by the north wind, rushed at high tide, the floor of the cave was lower than the threshold, and the way in was by a projecting platform that ran along the right side.

We stood there gazing at the darkness at the far end, and the darkness, as we looked, became more and more menacing. But, of course, I could not even hint that I wanted to turn back. For what would Samuel think and say then? And it wasn't in Samuel's nature to turn back.

"Come along," said he with a jaunty air, and he led the way along the ledge till we came to the end of the outer cave, where the light gave place to rayless darkness as we looked through the narrow opening that led to the inner cave. That opening seemed to be closed by a large circular block of rock that looked as if some giant had rolled it there to guard further intrusion. It was so placed that no sunlight could get past it. It was only by skilfully holding on to the projecting wall of the cave and crawling round the obstructing rock that we could make any progress.

Samuel considered the situation, just as Livingstone considered the obstacles that lay between him and Lake Victoria Nyanza. He suddenly turned back, and from the floor of the outer cave he picked up half a dozen round pebbles. Hope kindled in me that we were to turn back, but no. For Sam was back in no time where the inner cave yawned in perfect darkness before us.

"Just listen," said he, and he threw a pebble into the darkness. And there came back a hollow sound as of a moan, echoed and re-echoed.

"It is ghostly," said I. "We had better go home."

"Not till we have found out what lies behind that darkness," said Sam. "You stay here and I will make the first attempt."

Then Sam stepped out to solve the mystery. And there came a queer sound out of the darkness of a body falling and a scream that made my heart turn upside down.

"What has happened to you?" I cried into the darkness.

There was no answer. My blood suddenly got cold. What would I do if Sam were killed?

"Sam, what has happened to you?" I cried again and again.

At last there came a groan, and a muffled sound of words whose meaning I just grasped.

"I have fallen into a deep hole, and I have hurt my foot."

And out of the darkness came another groan; for Sam was trying what he could do.

"What can I do?" I asked tremulously.

"There's a piece of driftwood at the mouth of the cave. Get it and hand it down to me."

This I did as quickly as I could move on the slimy slippery stones. It was a round shaft of wood, probably a spike washed off some ship.

I passed one end down to Sam.

"Hold on to your end," he ordered.

And with patience and many a suppressed groan, pulling gently at the spike, and finding a foothold for the unhurt leg, Sam at last emerged out of the thick darkness, and crawled through the narrow aperture into the light of the outer cave.

"That's the end of our exploring for today," said he. "The Feinn will have to wait a little longer on their elbows. And I cannot walk back home."

"I'll run and get help," I said.

"Do that. You will find somebody at the schoolhouse."

I set out at once, but I was soon back at the cave.

"I can't get past the bottom of the cliff," I explained; "the tide has come in and it is too deep to wade."

Sam was now comfortably ensconced with his back against the wall of the cave, and his hurt leg stretched out on a flat stone.

"Aren't we the wise ones!" said he, "to have forgotten the spring tides and how fast the sea comes in. The ebb will be in an hour and you'll get past."

"What I am sorry about is the poor Feinn," said he. "It would be grand to be the one to blow the third blast on the magic horn and let them out into the sunlight again. One hour of darkness has been enough for me."

"What a coward that smuggler was," said I, "to have fled when he saw the fierce faces of the Feinn."



"I don't know that we would be braver," said Sam. "That darkness is awful."

"But how could he see them in the dark? That puzzles me."

"There was no difficulty about that," explained Sam, "for every smuggler of whom I ever heard did their smuggling by night, and therefore they always carried a lantern."

"My mother has a lantern," I exclaimed. "We will borrow it the next time."

"Aren't we the wise ones," responded Sam, "seeing that we didn't do that at the first."

In an hour the sea had ebbed sufficiently for me to wade round the projecting cliff; and, to make a long story short, I speedily returned with my father. Without many words he just lifted Sam on his back and carried him out of the cave. He then deposited him on a shelving rock and examined his ankle.

"There's no broken bone so far as I can make out," said he. "It is only a bad sprain."

With my father's arm supporting him, and his left hand on my shoulder, Sam hobbled to our house. And at the door my mother began to scold Sam and me for being the greatest mischief-makers on the Island, always in trouble. . . . But when she glanced at Sam's white face the words died on her lips.

"Oh, poor Sam!" said she. And he was laid on the settle in the kitchen. The ankle was bathed in hot water. A strip of linen was bound tightly round it. And Sam was in a short time, with great enjoyment, eating thick slices of bread and butter and jam.

"Norman, my hero," said he at the first opportunity, "it was worth it."

I saw my mother eyeing Sam's jacket with a pitying look. And after the foot was bandaged she went upstairs and was soon back with a jacket which my brother John had outgrown, and into which I had not yet fully grown. For it was my misfortune that I inherited John's jackets, and as he was four years older, the jacket got a holiday between its two spells of duty. And in the interregnum its condition by no means improved. But it was a sound jacket still.

"You take off that jacket," said my mother to Sam, "and put on this one." The exchange was soon made. And my mother examined Sam's old jacket with sorrowful eyes.

"I never saw so many rents and holes in a jacket in my life," said my mother.

"That is right," answered Sam. "I have more rents in my jacket

than Lord Macdonald will get any more from all his estates. It's me that am lucky."

That night Sam slept on the settle. His mother came and was very stern and grim. "I knew you were up to some mischief," said she, "when I saw you getting up so early and bringing home the peats before breakfast. But I wasn't prepared for your breaking your leg."

"It might have been worse, mother," comforted Sam.

"How could it be worse?" she asked.

"It might have been much worse," concluded Sam, "it might have been my neck."

In the morning Sam hobbled home with an arm round my shoulder. "Norman, my hero," said he in parting, "it was a grand day. I have got a jacket by it. We'll take a light the next time."

And he stroked the sleeve of what was John's old jacket and was now his new one. For ever since his father, Big Ewen, was drowned at the East Coast herring fishing at Fraserburgh, Sam never had a jacket made for himself.

"Norman, my brave," were his last words, "by the time we have blown the third blast on the magic horn I may have the whole suit."

## § 5.

My father was greatly interested by Samuel's play upon the word rent. The first day Sam was back at school, my father asked him at the playtime what put the rents for the crofts into his head in connection with his rent jacket. Sam's answer was clarity itself.

"There was a meeting the night before I fell in the cave," explained Sam, "and at the meeting they talked about the rents paid for their crofts, and that it was time they stopped paying them."

"What!" said my father. "Stop paying their dues and debts?"

"Well, Master," answered Sam, "Neil MacIan said that it wasn't Lord Macdonald who made the land and the hills and the rivers, and that they had already paid him enough, generation after generation. 'No more rents' said Neil over and over again, and at last they all said 'No more rents.' So when the kind words were spoken about the rents in my old jacket, I thought to myself that I had more rents than Lord Macdonald would have soon. And I just said so."

That night at supper my father said to my mother, "I am afraid there is going to be trouble in the Island."

"What sort of trouble are you thinking of?" she asked. "We have troubles enough already. We have had measles and whooping-cough and the potato blight, and the herring have stopped coming into the

Lochs: and soft, half-rotten potatoes and salt will be poor food in the crofters' houses. Troubles—we don't want any more troubles."

Then he told her what Sam had said in explanation of his witticism about rents.

"This is a law-abiding country," said my mother, "I don't believe there will be any trouble of that sort."

"Trouble begets trouble," said my father. "In Ireland the peasants are in revolt against the landlords. Every newspaper is full of maimed cattle, burnt houses, factors shot, and landlords killed. They have added a new word to the language."

"Which language?" she queried shortly. "Gaelic or English?"

Because he had been to college in Glasgow and had a big parchment authorising him to teach English everywhere, my father thought English was the one predestined language of the world. My mother could not sit still and hear English thus spoken of as "the language." For she was quite sure that the first words Adam spoke to Eve when she was presented to him were: "Ciamar tha sibh?" (How are you?)

My father scented a debate afar off.

"The word was first used in a Gaelic-speaking district of Ireland: so it would naturally be added to the Gaelic language first," he explained.

"That is all right," rejoined my mother, "but you haven't told me yet what new word this is that has been added to the Gaelic language."

"The word is 'boycott,'" he replied. "A Captain Boycott evicted some tenants, and the whole countryside put him in quandary. The servants all left; no shop would sell him food; nobody would speak to him. He was avoided as if he were a leper. One old man said, 'Ni sinn boycott air' (We will boycott him). In a week the new word 'boycott' was in all the papers."

My mother considered this for a minute or two and then gave judgment.

"So that's your new word," said she, "'boycott'! If he put them out of his lands he would not do it without good reason. To pay one's debts is the first duty a man owes his neighbour. They wouldn't pay and he put them out. Quite right, say I. And they have blackened his name by making it mean injustice and all sorts of inhuman and unchristian acts. You are welcome to the word as an addition to the English language. It will never be a word in the Gaelic language. I would not sully my lips, when I speak Gaelic, by such a wicked word."

"Well, wife," remonstrated my father, smiling guardedly, "you speak as if I invented the word 'boycott.' It was the Irish. . . ."

"I know you did not invent it," was her final pronouncement, "but

this I do know, that you said this new word was added to the English language. And you were right in saying so. You and the English language are welcome to the word. It will be no honour to either of you. As for the Gaelic language, which the Galatians spoke to St. Paul, it will have nothing to do with vulgar, upstart, irreligious words such as 'boycott.'"

That was the first I heard of the troubles that were soon to fill the whole Island with strife and feuds and raids. It is odd how one thing leads to another. Sam and I setting out to explore the cave and to release the Feinn led straight to rent clothes and tenants' rents, and so to Land Leagues and to the word "boycott."

I never forgot how I heard the first mutter of the coming storm. There was another thing I learned that night at supper, and that was that my father, though he was college-bred and had behind him a good record, was no match for my mother in an argument. For she had a great command of words and she had no scruple about unfairness, as when she pinned the word "boycott" on my father as if he had coined it.

Long afterwards, I happened to remark to my father that as a general rule women could not argue fairly according to the rules of Aristotle.

"No" said he, "women have no sense of logic."

And I am sure he found a great solace in that sentiment on many a day.

## § 6

THE summer had come and Samuel had not yet solved the problem of the light with which we would explore the cave, and at odd moments, when the green of the slopes and clouds on Dun Can were specially lovely, it sort of stabbed the heart to think of the Feinn still lying under the spell, left by that coward of a smuggler, leaning on their elbows. Every time I tried it myself to see what it was like, I found it became very painful in a short time. And they had to wait there, year after year, leaning on their elbows and unable to rise. I am not quite sure that Sam believed in the Feinn, for he was two years older than I, and we were in the same class in the school because Sam had on his shoulders the cares of the family. In summer he had to earn a little money by herding, and to fish on the rocks, and to hoe the potatoes and to lift peats—try to do everything his father would have done if he had come back alive from Fraserburgh. So Sam, because of his irregular attendance, was in my class. But there were others even older than Sam in the class for similar reasons. And it was no credit to me to be the youngest, because, being the Master's son, I was never a day absent,

and my father saw to it that I learned my lessons. When I came to Euclid's elements—that book that dominated the schools for 2200 years—and could see no meaning in the *pons asinorum*, my father knocked the meaning into me with his black ruler. "Whatever you may be, my boy," said he, "you will never be a mathematician. Now, your brother, John—of him I have great hopes. He just skipped over the 'Asses' bridge,' and he may quite well turn out a Senior Wrangler; but as for you, your arithmetic is a disgrace, and your propositions in Euclid a scandal. It will be no use sending you to college, I am afraid; and what we can do with you I cannot think."

"What is a Wrangler?" I asked, more to change the direction of the wind than anything else.

"The best students in Cambridge become Wranglers, win big Scholarships, become Fellows, and the subject by the mastery of which they thus come to high honour and wealth is Mathematics."

"Where is Cambridge?" was my next question.

"In England."

By this time I had read the wonderful stories that tell of the heroism of William Wallace, Robert the Bruce, and the Covenanters, and had come to believe that the Battle of Bannockburn was the greatest event in the history of the world.

"In England," I repeated, and then added firmly, "I don't want to go to Cambridge."

"You will never get the chance," said my father.

Like a red thread woven into a cloth, the thought of the cave and how we would discover its mystery was woven into the hearts of Sam and myself. The difficulty was to get the necessary light. Today that would be no difficulty whatever; but sixty-five years ago was quite another world. A candle and a box of matches would now solve the problem in an hour. But in that day there were no matches in all that wide district. For one thing, nobody had any use for matches. The fires on the hearths never went out. In some of the long-thatched houses the hearthstones had never grown cold for a hundred years or more. It was deemed a disgrace—a proof of bad housekeeping—if the peats were not so skilfully laid to smoor the fire when bedtime came that it was still hot in the morning. I never remember the fire in our house dying in the night. Nobody used a match to light a tobacco-pipe. A spill lighted at the fire or a glowing ember placed gently in the bowl served that end. In the fishing-boats at night they had flints out of which they struck a light. There were certainly no matches to kindle a light for little boys who would explore dark caves. And candles

there were none. Of course there were cruses, but they gave more smoke than light; and a paraffin lamp would require to be lit in the cave. How was that to be done; and how would it ever return unbroken from such an expedition?

A sudden solution of the problem came to me one day in early June when the whole family spent the Saturday cutting peats. Of all the lovely things in life, the loveliest was the long Saturdays we spent cutting and drying and stacking peat. There was the preparation spread over days: getting the peat-cutter into order, and the long turf-cutter that removed the upper skin of soil and heather. The rhythmic motion of the cutter—you pushed it straight down with your foot, pulled the haft a little towards you, and the peat was there ready to be thrown into the sunshine. And how skilfully the thrower below you threw the peat, each falling in a straight line, gleaming in the sun. The excitement of watching the damp black covering spreading from the bank over the heath; the break at one o'clock; the oatcake and fresh butter and cream and milk and boiled eggs; the song of the larks soaring upward to the blue and the song of the rivulet that warbled near; and the joy of going home in the evening and coming to the top of Creag Bhan where the full beauty of the Sound burst into view—bathed in the rays of the setting sun, reflecting the kaleidoscopic glories of the golden azure clouds—such days come not again.

On that day which I remember so well, the spade uncovered a nest of bog-pine roots. Yellow and firm, they had lain there for centuries—proof that these hills were once densely wooded.

"That," said my father, "will burn like a torch when it is dried."

Next Sunday I brought Sam to our peat-banks and showed him the roots. At once he set to work with his knife, which he always kept sharp, ready for use. And he cut two long strips and we each took one to dry. We reckoned that a fortnight would suffice. What between the June sun and clandestine toasting at the fire, that would be enough. We also collected a little heap of hard peat to make a fire at the mouth of the cave.

The night before our second attempt it rained so heavily that even the rocks along the shore looked drenched. Under the shelter of a projecting rock, beside the entrance to the cave, we kindled our fire. It wasn't a bright fire, owing to the damp, but it was sufficient to light the first of our substitutes for torches. It burned brightly and crackled as it burned, but, owing to the slipperiness of the boulders, it took us some time to get to the narrow passage. Sam let himself down carefully into the hole and up again, while I held the torch behind him. Its light struggled dimly with the blackness beyond. When I followed

Sam, I had only one hand to grip the crevices in the wall of the cave, for the other held the torch, and unfortunately I stumbled and to save myself I dropped the torch and held on with both hands to a rock. Instantly we were in complete darkness, for with a splutter the torch went out.

There was nothing for it but to go back to the fire to relight the torch while Sam waited. But when I got to the fire I found that a sudden squall of rain had extinguished it. So back I hurried.

"Sam," said I, "the fire is out and I cannot relight the torch."

At that he emerged slowly out of the darkness.

"Did you see anything?" I asked excitedly.

"The only thing I made out," he answered, "was a whitish shape leaning against the side of the cave."

"That," said I, "would be the first of the Feinn on his elbow."

"May be," said Sam doubtfully.

## § 7

AFTER that second failure some weeks passed before we made the last attempt to free the Feinn. When the days began to shorten, my mother found that she must get a new lantern. Milking the cow in the dark was almost as difficult as exploring caves. When I saw that lantern in use I knew that the problem of the cave was solved. But we had to bide our time. It would need to be a Saturday when in the absence of the cat the mice might play. That is, of course, a badly chosen simile; for there was nothing of the cat about my mother nor of the mouse about Sam. But what is a poor writer to do when he cudgels his brain and cannot find a better?

We had grown wiser by experience, and we didn't light a fire at the cave this time. Sam brought a small three-legged iron pot, and we filled it with red peat embers. Then we hurried with the pot and the lantern to the cave. At the entrance, with a paper spill, kindled after blowing the pot into a flame, Sam lit the lantern, and confidently, like two bold buccaneers, we advanced into the cave. Cortez gazing at the Pacific could not have been more thrilled than we were. Sam carried the lantern himself. Owing to my failure with the torch, I was deposed from the office of light-bearer.

Without mishap we got into the inner cave, and the lantern revealed to our amazement a circular chamber with a flooring of polished shingle. Leaning against the side was a big tangle that must have been there for years, for it was blanched a dull white.

"That's your first of the Feinn," said Sam, touching the tangle with his foot. At the touch it crumbled into dust.

"There must be a hidden door," I exclaimed. "It cannot end like this."

Sam put down the lantern after flashing its light along the sides and arched roof of the cave. And then he tapped the sides with a pebble. But there was no hollow sound anywhere. There could be no doubt the cave ended just there.

"Oh, Sam," I cried, "it doesn't come out at the other side of the Island."

"No," answered Sam, "it doesn't. It ought to, but this cave is like Angus Maryann: it doesn't do what it ought."

"And what about the Feinn?" I queried.

"That's all right," said Sam, "they are somewhere else. We haven't hit on the right cave."

When we got out of the cave and Sam was extinguishing the lantern, I stood gazing at the sea. A splutter of rain came across the bay. And I felt as if a knife had turned in my inside. We had for so long planned exploring the cave and releasing the poor Feinn, and it had all ended in nothing. I tried hard to keep it down, but a lump would come up in my throat, and I gave an uncontrollable sniff.

"Not crying, Norman?" said Sam, coming to my side with the now dark lantern in one hand and the pot in the other.

"No," I replied, "I am not crying."

When we got beyond the cliff we parted. I got the lantern and Sam went rapidly up the steep brae with the little three-legged pot in his hand. But the little pot was now cold, for there was no fire in it any more.

One result of our exploring the cave was that I got rid of the dream of the Feinn lying on their elbows unable to rise. For, thought I, if Granny was wrong about the cave, she no doubt was also wrong about the Feinn. But the amazing thing was that nobody believed Sam or me when we told them that the cave ended so abruptly.

"Granny," said I the next day, "Sam and I went into the cave and we found that it ends quite soon. It doesn't go in for miles, nor does it come out at the other side of the Island under the sea."

"How did you come by that knowledge?" she asked.

So I told her. But she was not in the least impressed.

"There must be some mistake," said she, "for my grandfather told me what I told you. And he told me also that a piper went in playing a tune, and the people waited at the entrance for him to return: and the music got fainter as he went on. And then he changed the tune. The last they heard, faint and far away, was the tune:

*Cha till, cha till, cha till mi tuilleadh.*

*Cha till gu brath gu la na cruinne.*



Now, Ronald, whom am I to believe? My grandfather, who was a man as truthful as any in the Island and wiser than most; or Sam and you. Everybody knows that Sam is a scatterbrain with a new tale every day; and you, Ronald, are just a little boy. And all the old and wise people in the Island say the same as my grandfather said to me. Unless you want to get a bad name as an inventor of fables and a common liar, Ronald, my hero, I advise you never to say another word of what you told me about the cave."

When Sam and I talked it over I found that he fared even worse, for Alasdair MacChallum, the best teller of old stories in all the Island, laid his stick smartly across Sam's shoulders.

"What is this I hear you say, Sam?" he exclaimed in kindled anger. "Do you think that any wise person in the Island will believe what a peasan<sup>1</sup> like you will say against the truths handed down by our ancestors of old—men of renown and wiser far than we are. Take that," said he, lifting high his stick. . . .

"And my back is sore yet," said Sam.

That was how Sam and I learned our first great lesson: that the world is never grateful to those who tell them the truth. Sam told me that he felt lonely now, for he and I were the only ones who knew the truth about the cave and the Feinn and the piper who played "Cha till mi tuilleadh," and nobody would believe us.

So we never said another word to anybody about the cave. It was better to be silent than to be thrashed.

<sup>1</sup> A boy without manners.

## A WORLD OF WONDER AND MYSTERY

## § I

IT WAS THE BAY OF CAMUS-A-MHOR BHEOIL (pronounced in brief Camus-a-mhor'il—the bay of the big mouth) that held the greatest place in our young hearts. For there on the white sandy bottom the fish gathered from the Minch, and in those days we had only to launch the boat, cast anchor in the favourite spots, let down a baited line, and the boat would soon have enough fish to last for days—cods, flounders, haddocks, and whittings in their season. But best of all was the fishing for lythe round the black rock and along the cliffs at the back of Aird. For often a lythe would fight like a salmon and skill was required to land it. The place that was most frequented by lythe was alongside the old castle near the point of Aird—a prehistoric fort of which now only a ruckle of stones remains. In my young days there was part of a wall standing, with a square embrasure which we called a window. And when Angus MacBhannain was with us he always steered the boat on a course by the "Uineag a Chasteil" (the window of the castle), and a lythe was often the reward. Alas! the building of new houses meant the destruction of the old fort, for it was made a quarry by the folk who could no longer be content to live on in black houses with thatched roofs and earthen floors. It is sad that the new so often means the passing of the old.

It is not, however, of the golden days spent fishing in the bay that I have sat down to write, but of an old woman who lived on its shore in the strangest house in all the Island. The bay faces north, and when the north wind blows in strength, the great waves roll up on the beach, running all the way from Iceland, with a roar that can be heard a mile away. The centre of the beach through long centuries has been ground by the surge into fine sand, while the sides, where the waves did not have free course, are still rocky. On the west side a tongue of rocks runs out fifty yards or so which acts as a buffer for the western corner of the bay. There the rounded shingle prevails, and there on the sheltered shore old Chirsty's husband built a breakwater, and on the

stance thus reclaimed erected a thatched house where he and his wife lived comfortably on a pension of a shilling a day. For that was Hector's reward for twenty-one years' service in the Army. Once I asked him, long, long ago, what struck him most in the battles of the Crimean War, and all he answered was, "The bullets that missed me."

I remember so well hearing him explaining to my father how fortunate he had been in his life. "The Queen, bless her," he would say, "fed me and clothed me and gave me pocket-money for twenty years and more; then I came home with a pension, small but adequate, and I married Chirsty. Walking round the bay, it struck me that that corner was the very place for a house. So I set to work and was very careful that the stance was below the tide water-mark."

"Why that?" asked my father.

"Because then I would require to pay no rent. Nobody could touch me but God alone. It was not Lord Macdonald who made the great sea that cast up the shingle that made the beach; it was the Creator of heaven and earth. So I built below the tide-mark and Lord Macdonald never asked me for a sixpence. And I have had no rates and no taxes to pay. While at Martinmas the tenants of Balmeanach are racking their brains how to get money to pay rent and rates, there sit I, like Lord Macdonald himself, rent-free and rates-free and tax-free. In fact, Master, I am better off than Lord Macdonald, for the Morair himself has to pay rates and taxes like the rest, but I alone in the Island am scot-free."

"Well, Hector," said my father, "you have been a wise man and deserve your good fortune, for you fought our battles for us."

"There is one other thing, Master, that comforts me in my house," said Hector, "and that is when the north wind blows its worst and the big waves send eddies swirling round the rocks and I wake at night hearing the shingle dragged down by the receding wave—moaning and crying like children in agony—and I remember the moaning of the wounded round Sebastopol. And I turn over and go to sleep again feeling a glow of thankfulness coming around my heart. There isn't an old soldier of the Queen who hears such a call to gratitude as I do when the north wind hurls the waves against my wall and drags down the sobbing shingle."

"That is a beautiful way of looking at it," said my father.

"And there's more than that," concluded the old soldier, "not only am I rent-free and rates-free, but I am also food-free. I have only to drop a hook into the sea there at my door and I have my dinner provided for me by God, free of any charge. And I can always get a piece of land for growing potatoes, and for that land I give a day or two's

work. And the hills supply me with good black peats, so that my fire costs me nothing. Indeed, were it not for tobacco for myself and tea for Chirsty I would be hard put to it to find ways of spending my pension of a shilling a day. I sometimes think that I am the richest man in all the Island—next to Lord Macdonald himself!”

## § 2

WHEN old Hector, at a wonderful old age, surrendered to the last enemy whom none can resist, Chirsty was left alone in the house won from the sea. She was much younger than Hector and remained vigorous and alert for many years after he was gone. She too loved the sea, and was never lonely because of the comradeship of the waves. But she was never alone for long, for she was a wise woman, skilled in all the remedies known of old in the Island for the ailments of women and children and also of men.

That little room of hers that had a fire, not in the centre of the floor, but on a hearth against the gable, with a hanging wooden chimney which Hector had made to catch the smoke, was in many respects as good as a chemist's shop. The difference between Chirsty and the scientific chemist who now supplies my wants in Portree was only this, that Chirsty prepared and compounded all her own remedies. The drawers of her dresser (which she kept always scrubbed and shining) were filled with simples and packets of herbs and of roots, each packet carefully tied with yarn spun on her own wheel. Up on the rafters hung the plants in process of drying—*Lus an rois* (Cancerwort); *Fuinneag-Coille* (golden-rod); *Lus a chrubain* (Gentian); *Am Bearnan Brighda* (Dandelion)—a plant she specially loved as that of the greatly beloved Saint Bridget; *Lus an Righ* (King's Herb) . . . Chirsty could pass a day very happily telling the names of plants and their healing properties—how one could cure indigestion, and one palpitation, and one broken bones! Now, alas! my memory is failing and I cannot remember all the names and all the qualities of the plants, but Chirsty knew them all. And in the season she could always be seen by streams and on the moor, picking the plants for her herbalist collection. . . .

It is strange the way the mind works. Fifty-eight, or so, years after I had last seen Chirsty's herbs, I visited a derelict monastery in Majorca. It was tenantless because Republican Spain had closed the monasteries and appropriated their revenues. But one room was unchanged, its walls lined with bottles filled with simples and concoctions prepared by the monks, over many years, for the healing of the sick. As I looked at that room, tenantless and deserted, with the remedies still on the

shelves round the walls, I remembered old Chirsty and her ointments and herbs, though I had not thought of her for more than fifty years. I have no doubt that Chirsty would not have once been pleased at being thus associated in my mind with monks and priests, yet she was at one with them in healing the woes of men. And I am quite sure that Chirsty is now very pleased at my counting her of that Christ-like fellowship.

## § 3

CHIRSTY never claimed that her gift of healing was of her own merits. One day when I was between ten and eleven years of age I was sent in great haste to Chirsty to get some medicine for old Granny, who lived, as I have told, beyond the hill wall. Granny had a violent attack of palpitation and she had great faith in Chirsty's medicine. So my mother sent me running that mile and a half to the corner of the bay, and there I told Chirsty my errand. She at once set me on a chair beside the fire while she quickly got the herbs she wanted and set them to boil on the fire. And while the pan tarried before boiling, Chirsty talked.

"How did you learn all your healing knowledge?" I asked shyly.

"I learned it from my grandfather," she replied. "My mother was a daughter of the last of the Bethunes, who for hundreds of years were the physicians of the Lord of the Isles. When I was a girl I spent much of my time with my grandfather, and he taught me the healing powers of the different herbs."

"Where did the Bethunes come from?" I asked, "for their name is unlike the rest of the Island folk."

That started Chirsty on the history of her mother's family. "They have no 'Mac' in the name because they came long, long ago from Fife. Their home was in Balafour,<sup>1</sup> where once a Bethune married the daughter of the Laird. Peter, the grandson of the fifth Laird of Balafour, acquired great knowledge of the art of healing, and the Lord of the Isles brought him west and settled him in Kilmuir. That was four hundred years ago or more. And every Bethune and Beaton in the Island is descended from that Peter, the grandson of the Laird of Balafour. And from father to son the knowledge of the herbs and their healing powers has been handed down through the generations. But the Beatons (as they now call themselves) have forgotten their birth-right and prefer to sell tea and tobacco rather than simples. The knowledge has died. I am the last who knows the secret."

<sup>1</sup> Bal-a-four is Gaelic for the *cold* township or land, and gave its name to the family of Earl Balfour. Fife was Gaelic-speaking in the reign of Mary Queen of Scots.

She stirred the peats under the pan, but it came not to the boil. "My mother's family were of noble blood," she went on. "A Bethune was always a councillor of the Lord of the Isles. My grandfather told me that an ancestor of his wrote a charter in Gaelic, which the Lord of the Isles gave to a MacKay in Islay four hundred and sixty years ago! Think of that now, Thormoid, a ghraidh, all those weary years and naore we have been honourable and gentlefolk in the Isles."

She gave another look at the pan, but it was sullenly still—not a bubble coming to the surface.

"Do you know, Thormoid, my calf, the story of Dr. Bethune in Mull and how he was blown up to heaven?"

"That story is one I never heard. Please tell it me."

"It was three hundred years ago," went on Chirsty, "when Spain sent the great Armada to conquer England. You know about that, don't you?"

"Fifteen hundred and eighty-eight," I answered promptly.

"Now isn't that a clever boy!" Chirsty went on. "So I need not tell of the great storm that scattered the fleet and how the great ship that had the treasure in her hold, the *Florida*, was swept before the gale till she came to Tobermory, where she anchored. Her captain fell sick and he was told that the cleverest doctor in the Three Kingdoms was there in Mull, Dr. Bethune or Macbeth (as the ignorant Mullaich called him). So he sent for Dr. Bethune, who examined him and told him what to do. And as the doctor stood on deck talking to an officer before going on shore, the *Florida* was blown up and he was hurled heavenward as if he were a balloon. He went so high that he thought he would never come down again, but he did, and fell into the harbour with a flop that resounded round the bay. A boat picked him up and he lived twenty years thereafter to tell the tale."

"Was he not injured?" I asked.

"Nor at all," answered Chirsty. "When he got home he brewed himself a drink of his favourite herbs and he was as well as ever in the morning. When he told the story he always ended it by saying, 'I will never be so near heaven in this world as I was on the day when I was blown up sky-high from the deck of the *Florida* in Tobermory harbour.' And when my grandfather told me that, what I said was, 'If that were so, isn't it a pity he ever came down again!'"

"But, Chirsty," I persisted, "you never told me why the *Florida* blew up."

"It is you, Thormoid, laogh mo chridhe (calf of my heart) who are good at asking questions; but it would have been better if you had not asked that one question."

"Why so, Chirsty?" I asked hurriedly.

"It was so long ago, Thormoid, a chagair," she concluded, "and nobody can blame you in any way."

"Why blame me?" I asked, fairly nettled.

"It is this way," she explained; "they all say that the Macleans blew up the *Florida* that they might fish up the treasure afterwards from the harbour; for the Macleans were great reivers and respected no man's property when their eyes fell on it. And that treasure-ship was a sore temptation even to godly men, and the Macleans were not famed for godliness. But it was so long ago that nobody can blame you, Thormoid, beloved of my heart."

She lifted the lid off the pan once more, and it was now gently simmering. Out of a drawer she took a piece of fine muslin and spread it over the top of a jug, and through the cloth she poured, as through a sieve, the contents of the pan. And out of the jug she poured a golden fluid into the bottle I had brought.

"Hurry now," said she, "and when Granny drinks this she will be all right tomorrow."

"What is it made of?" I asked at the door.

"Thormoid, my little son, I could not tell that to anyone but you. The main ingredient is the Mother of dulse (carrigen), and dulse, and one other which I will not tell even to you, my little sweetheart."

And I ran the mile and a half back to the little house on the moor; and, as Chirsty had said, old Granny, in the cot-house on the moor, was herself in the morning.

#### § 4

WHEN I happened to tell Sam the story of the doctor in Tobermory who was blown up to heaven, and of the Bethunes, and of old Chirsty and her herbs, he was not to be outdone like that by anybody. He pulled himself together, and by an adroit touch made a small rent in his sleeve less prominent.

"I also, Thormoid, a bhallich (boy), have had an adventure," he began boldly. And he told me with many vivid phrases and gestures how Mrs. Ronaldson, who kept a shop in her barn in summer and in her kitchen in winter, suddenly discovered that her cows were only giving half their milk, and how she concluded that Peggie Dhubh at Tor-na-Cro had by her spells taken the milk from them; and how he, Sam, was sent in the early morning to the house of a wise woman, Morag the widow of Ewen Og, with a shilling in his hand, to get a

charm that would save Mrs. Ronaldson's milk. The black art practised by Peggie was known as "Toirt an toradh fho'n a chrodh" (taking their milk from the cows), and the way she did it was this: she cut off the tops of the Biolaire (water-cress), and as she did so she muttered, "Sleumsa leth do chuidsa" (half of thine is mine), naming the person she despoiled. And Sam's task was to get a charm that would defeat Peggie. It was an errand after his own heart, and he ran and skipped as he made his way, shortly after dawn, to Mòrag's house.

He roused Morag out of her bed, and when she was told his errand she looked towards the east.

"You are just in time," said she, "for the sun is not yet risen."

Only in the half-light of morning could she exercise her gifts. And taking a bowl, she filled it with fresh water at the stream beside her house, and in the bowl she placed the white money. And then over it she recited her incantations.

"What were they?" I asked, tremulous with interest and eager for knowledge.

"I don't know," answered Sam; "but I know this, that at the end she said the same words three times and I asked her what they were and she said that these were the powerful words, The Padernostra—whatever that is. But I know that Mrs. Ronaldson gave her cows the 'water over the silver' that night, and she had twice as much milk in the morning."

"Do you believe that yourself, Sam?" I asked doubtfully.

"Do I believe that Peggie milked Mrs. Ronaldson's cows from the slamhruidh (the chain above the fire on which she hung her pots)? Well, Thormoid, a charaid, to tell you the truth, I do not. But there's something in it. You see, when Peggie's mother died, her presses were found to be full of jars filled with butter and there was a chest filled with the finest cheeses ever seen in the Island. And Peggie's mother, who was just as like Peggie as two pennies are like each other, never owned a cow nor a goat in her life. There is a lot left to find out yet."

It was at St. Andrews that I discovered, a few years later, that "Padernostra" was simply the Latin for the first two words of the Lord's Prayer (Pater Noster); and that saying the prayer in mutilated Latin three times was Morag's invocation of the help of the Trionaid bheannaichte (the blessed Trinity) in her fight with the black arts of Satan. And I have no doubt whatever that Morag was as sincere in using her gifts as the numerous spell-binders in our day, who in many ways so easily find their credulous clients.



## § 5

IN those days the world was full of wonder and mystery to me. There was no doubt of the efficacy of Chirsty's herbs. But to milk a neighbour's cows from the chain above the hearth was another matter. I could not ask my father to explain, for that would only mean getting punished for frivolity and superstition and for enquiring about the black arts. I hinted the problem to several grown-up folk, but was none the wiser. One day I met Uileam Ruadh (Red William) on the hill, and hailed him as a mariner does land when far from his port. William owned double the number of sheep and cows that anybody else had in the township. He did so because he was out on the hills in all weathers looking after his flock. He was counted the shrewdest man in all the Braes.

"Do you believe, Uileam," said I, "that Peggie Dhubh could milk anyone's cows from the slamhruidh above her hearthstone?"

William grinned from ear to ear.

"Thormoid," he replied, "you are the queerest boy in all Braes, and I might say more than that—even in all the Island. I never know what question you will ask next. Being red-headed, as I was myself once and still am so named, I would expect that you would be wiser and ask questions that would increase your knowledge. But you ask such useless questions."

"Not useless," I replied. "Surely it would be most useful if you could milk your slamhruidh. You would not need cows then. Think of all the labour you would be saved."

"Thormoid, my valiant one," said William, "I'll tell you a story. When my father began work years and years ago, it was as herdboy to 'Fear an Ollaich' (the tenant of Ollach). One morning in summer he was herding seven cows near the shore when a boat was seen approaching. The Captain, his master, who then had Ollach, looked at the boat through a telescope and he came running down the hill. He ordered the herd to take the cows at once away from the shore and to put them beyond the dyke, up the hill, for danger was in the air. 'Run,' said he, 'and don't let the grass grow under your feet.' So my father ran and rounded up the cows and made for the hill. But one of them broke away when he was half-way and ran back to the sweet grass near the shore. The people in the boat had landed by that time, and as they passed they looked at the cow. One of them stood gazing at the cow after the rest had gone on. Next morning that cow was found dead in the byre, but the other six were as sound and as well as ever."

"What happened to that cow?" I asked, wide-eyed.

"It was this way," answered William slowly. "The Captain, through the glass, saw in the boat a man whom he knew (he was from Applecross or Gairloch or Aultbea, I don't know which) who had the *Evil Eye*. By acting immediately he saved the six cows. But the *Evil Eye* of that stranger fell on the seventh cow and she was dead in the morning. . . . Now, Thormoid, my brave, you be careful that the *Evil Eye* does not look at you, and see you through and through, and so put an end to your endless questions. And such questions! Only *Ti mhor Bheannaite* (The Great and Blessed One) would answer all the questions which you go about asking honest people. You'll get into trouble if you don't keep your tongue silent. If not from the *Evil Eye*, trouble will come from somewhere."

"But you have not answered my question about Peggie and the *slamhruidh*," I remonstrated.

"When Peggie's mother died," replied William, "her house was found full of butter and cheese and crowdy. Now, the butter was yellow as gold, the cheese as clean as Cheddar, and the crowdy white as snow. Now, Thormoid, what would they be like if she milked the *slamhruidh*?"

"She couldn't keep the soot on the chain out of the milk. They would be streaked with black," I answered.

"Like a mulatto," he exclaimed. "A clever red-haired boy should not ask questions he can answer himself. Nobody need be so clever as you are, Thormoid, to know that wherever and however Peggie's mother got the milk, she did not get it by milking the *slamhruidh*. Asking questions whose answer you know is worse than theft."

And William whistled to his dog and went up the hill walking with the light step of a man who is no stranger to heather and to bent.

## § 6

A DAY or two later, Sam and I went fishing, but the day was sunny and windless and we were catching few fish. So to pass the time I told him about Red William and his verdict on Peggie and her mother. Suddenly Sam's face became preternaturally solemn.

"Excuse you me," said he, speaking very slowly, with a voice like the Elder's, "I cannot any more have anything to do with the black art or the white art or with any question so serious as that of taking the *toradh bho'n chrodh*."

"What has happened now?" I asked in amazement.

"It is this way," Sam explained. "Two days ago the Elder came

to our house and he told my mother that he had heard rumours of my meddling with charms and spells and the black arts; and that if he heard any more of that sort I would be refused baptism."

"What, Sam!" I exclaimed; "have you never been baptized?"

"Not yet," explained Sam. "You see, Thormoid, a sheoid, my father was a great whistler. He never heard an air or a tune but he would go along the roads whistling it. It's from him I got my whistling. And then he loved to sing the old Gaelic songs. It was no use his asking baptism for his children, for he would be told that he must stop whistling and singing worldly songs. And he couldn't do that, and he didn't like the songs of Dugald Buchanan. Before he could change his ways he was drowned—and that's how I am outside the means of grace and of the hope of glory."

Sam rolled these last words round his tongue as if he relished them.

"Are you really very desirous of being baptized?" I asked, wondering at this new phase of Sam's.

"Of course," answered Sam, "for I am told by my grandmother and by the professors of the true religion that all those who die unbaptized go to hell and that they are there roasted to all eternity. Now, Thormoid, you would not like me to run that risk, and me going to sea as soon as I can, sailing on a big ship over the ocean. It would be an awful end to be drowned and wake up in hell because I wasn't baptized."

"It is a good thing that I have been baptized," I said.

"Who baptized you?" Sam shot the question at me.

"The parish minister," I answered.

"That is worse than not being baptized at all," was Sam's verdict. "You see, Thormoid, you have been baptized by a minister of a 'Christ-denying, God-dishonouring, soul-destroying Church,' and you cannot but share in her condemnation. I heard a minister using these very words on the Monday of the last Communion. He said them first in English and then in Gaelic. When I hear lovely words like that they make me giddy and I never forget them! 'Christ-denying, God-dishonouring, soul-destroying.' There is good hope for me. I may get baptized yet by a minister of the true Church and escape hell. But, Thormoid, there is no hope for you whatever."

Thereupon a terrible dark cloud spread from Ben Lee over the bay and I fell silent. Then I remembered what I heard my father say to my mother after worship on a Sunday evening.

"Sam," said I quickly, "you are in no better case than I am. For if you are not of the elect you go to hell whatever you do, whether you are baptized or not, and it matters nothing who baptizes you. My father says so."

Sam pondered this for a while.

"It doesn't seem fair, somehow," said he, "but the Master must be right. Just fancy that fate: roasted to all eternity, and nothing I can do can prevent it if I am not of the elect. Thormoid, I am sure I am not of the elect."

"Then," said I, "we'll be in hell together."

"That's one comfort," concluded Sam. "And I need not bother about getting baptized. After all, I don't think I ever cared very much about it."

"A lot can be said against it," I said.

"A great lot," concluded Sam. "Last week my mother sent me on a message to Alasdair's house. It was a lovely evening and I went up the brae whistling better than ever I did in all my life. While I was yet fifty yards away, Alasdair's door opened and Susan came running down, her bare feet glittering white in the sunlight. When near enough, she called out in great excitement, 'Sam, Sam, stop whistling.' 'Why should I stop?' I asked; 'the very blackbirds are whistling.' 'Stop, Sam, stop,' she panted. 'For the minister is in the house and it would be terrible if he heard you.' You know, Thormoid, getting baptized is not worth the price."

In the gloaming we went ashore and with help got the boat pulled up. We divided the fish: four haddocks, two flounders, four codlings for each. Sam slung his on a withy and he went up the brae whistling like one possessed. And I knew from that whistling that Sam defied "Election" and defied the Elder and declared war on the minister. Susan's bare legs twinkling in the sunlight and her panic-cry "Stop whistling" were the instruments elected for making Sam a rebel.

## THE SEANNACHIE

## § I

I DON'T REMEMBER how old I was when I first saw the Cuchullin hills. Not long ago I heard it said that there wasn't a place in all the Island from which you couldn't see the Cuchullins. It was a Sassenach who said so; but nobody who ever lived in the wide district of the Braes facing Raasay would say so. For Ben Lee, on whose skirts we lived, lay between us and the great hills that dominate the Island. For us Ben Lee blanketed the Cuchullins. And Ben Lee looked from the sea like a stranded whale. All the other hills soared into pinnacles and presented a sharp point against the sky, like Ben Dianaveg; or two sharp points like Glamaig; but Ben Lee showed nothing but a rounded hump. Girt by that glorious galaxy of hills we were apologetic regarding Ben Lee, on whose fringe we lived.

It was shortly after that feeling of loneliness which came from the limitation of the cave that on a day of days I resolved to see more of the Island. I heard some one say that though Ben Lee was not so high as other hills yet that the view from it was the most beautiful in the Island. My duty, since John went away to school at Inverness, was to bring down the cow from the hill pasture, in the evening, to be milked. That day I started early, determined to reach the top of Ben Lee before doing my evening task. And if the way was long to the top I wasn't long reaching it. And when the great mass of the Cuchullins suddenly rose before my sight, seven miles or so away, my heart almost stood still with wonder and awe at the glory of the scene. For the westering sun lit up the peaks with gold and azure. On the slopes played little flecks of silvery clouds. High overhead swam great sheep-fleeces whose edges sparked like girdles of many jewels. Like a great amphitheatre Glen Sligachan stretched before me, flanked by its hills. Over all soared Sguir na Ghilleann, with its solitary peak keeping watch and ward over the Island. I have seen many mountains since then. I have watched the clouds gather on the Alps. I have seen the equatorial sun glistening on the snow of Kilimanjaro. But I have never seen

any scene so marvellously majestic and lovely as that first view of the Cuchullins.

But I could not linger. So I began to make my way down towards the place where I saw a herd of cows grazing on the fresh green heath. And there, leaning on an old turf dyke, his back to the wind and his face to the sun, as the islander ever wished to take his rest, I found Alasdair MacChallum, watching the herd. And there was Betty grazing with the rest, so I had not to search for her in the little valleys which so often hid her. I had therefore almost an hour to spare. So I sat down beside Alasdair with my back also to the wind and face to the sun. Now Alasdair was a famed seannachie. He never forgot anything he ever heard. The Chinese have a proverb that the palest ink is better than the strongest memory; but I am certain that Alasdair's memory could beat any record made with ink.

When I told him that I had seen the Cuchullins for the first time he asked if I knew how these great hills got that strange name. "You know the meaning of the name?" "No, I don't." "Strange," said Alasdair, "and you a good scholar too." "No, I am not," I rejoined, "I cannot do my arithmetic sums, and Euclid is a maze and a puzzle." "It would be far better if the Master taught you the meaning of what you see, and the story of the Island in which you live, than teaching you to add up and subtract pounds, shillings, and pence that you will never see. But, as it is so warm behind this dyke, I'll tell you what the name of the mountains means and how they got the name." And this was what Alasdair told me there on the slope of Ben Lee on that summer day.

## § 2

"Cu is the Gaelic word for dog, and Coolin was the armourer of the great King Conacher who reigned in Ireland. One day Coolin invited the King and his household to a feast, and, on their way, the King noticed four boys playing shinty in a field. What amazed him as he stood looking at the game was that the smallest boy of the four was playing the other three and beating them. For his running was swift as a gale of wind, and when he struck the ball it rose as into the clouds.

"'Who is that boy?' asked the King of the Captain of the Guard.

"'He is Saanda, the son of Your Majesty's sister.'

"The King watched a little longer and the game got fast and furious, but the ball was always passing into the goals defended by the three. For Saanda scarcely touched the ground, so light of foot was he and so swift.

"Bring the boy to me," ordered the King. And the Captain brought Saanda.

"You are my sister's son," said the King to Saanda, 'and worthy are you of your royal ancestry. We are on our way to Coolin's, to a feast he has prepared for us. Come you, Saanda, and take your share of the feast. For I am well pleased that a nephew of mine playing shinty can beat three at once.'

"Saanda bowed low and answered, 'My three adversaries are not yet satisfied they cannot beat me, and they have not yet had enough. So Your Majesty will excuse me till they have had enough. And when they confess they are beaten, I shall follow.'

"So it was arranged. The King and his guard went on their way and soon arrived at Coolin's Dun.<sup>1</sup> Coolin asked if they were all there, and the King, forgetting Saanda, said they were. So Coolin put his big hound on guard and shut the gate of the Dun.

"When the three boys at last confessed they were beaten, Saanda set out to follow the King to Coolin's Dun. And the way he journeyed was in this manner. He would tee his ball, give it a mighty stroke, and then run after it; tee it again and give another stroke. Thus the road seemed quite short to Saanda; and the feast had scarcely begun when the hound saw Saanda coming and gave a howl that shook the Dun, and ran swiftly to devour him.

"But Saanda teed his ball for the last time, and when the hound was coming with open mouth, he struck the ball, and it flew straight at the hound and into his mouth and down his gullet and out at the other end—so mighty was Saanda's stroke with his club.

"The noise was so great that Coolin came out to see whether the end of the world was come. And there was the hound dead and the boy standing beside it. 'I am Saanda the son of Sualtin and nephew of the King, who asked me to follow him here.'

"You are welcome for your father's and your mother's sake, but what will I do now without my faithful hound to guard the Dun?"

"You get a puppy of that breed," said the boy, 'and I'll wait with you and be your watchdog until the puppy grows to be a hound as good as this one which lies dead at our feet.' Coolin accepted the offer. And so Saanda got the name of Cu-Chullin—Coolin's Dog. He was a great warrior, came to Skye and drove out the giants and the pagans, and gave his name to the great hills which ever after were known as Cu-Chullin."<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Castle.

<sup>2</sup> Abbreviated now to Coolins.

## § 3

SUCH was Alasdair's story. I turned round and lay on my front, my head cupped in my hands and my feet in a bunch of heather. When Alasdair ended his tale he looked me in the face and said, "Norman, my hero, it is the grand listener you are. Some are so dull that you might as well be talking to a sack of potatoes as telling them a tale of the ancient days. But some day you will be a teller of tales yourself, and people will say that you tell a story as well as Alasdair MacChallum himself."

"Oh, Alasdair," said I, "if my listening pleases you, do tell me another story. I have heard it said that you can see things nobody else in the Island can see. Could you tell me about that?"

Alasdair looked at me, surprised-like; and looked over at Glamaig to see how-high the shadow of Ben Lee had risen on its side. He had yet half an hour!

"It is so," he agreed. "I can see what others cannot see, but that is through no cleverness of mine. It came to me from my great-grandfather and from his father before him. But my great-grandfather was the greatest seer of us all. In the spring of that black year, the year of the Battle of Culloden, when Prince Charlie lost the Crown, and the Clans the last battle, my great-grandfather was planting potatoes and his daughter was putting the sea-ware in the furrows after him, when suddenly he threw down the cas-chrom<sup>1</sup> and stood still as a stone.

"'Woe is me,' he cried, 'I'll work no more today; for I see my people scattered before the enemy. I see one man advancing alone to combat with the foe, and the rest refusing to follow. He falls dead and they flee with the bullets like hail falling on them. Woe, woe, it is a day of gloom, of desolation, of death.'

"And he went home and refused to work for days. On that very day and at that very hour, Macdonald of Keppoch, when the Clan Donald refused to charge, advanced alone against Cumberland's host, crying, 'My God, have the children of my tribe forsaken me?' Here in the Island my great-grandfather saw it all, a hundred and twenty miles away."

"He had the second sight sure enough," said I, hoping that Alasdair would not stop.

"Oh yes," went on Alasdair, "we have all had it—but especially every seventh son. And I was unfortunate, for I was the seventh son of my father. It is a sore burden I have had to carry."

"How so?" I asked.

<sup>1</sup> The crooked spade: now a mere memory.



"It is a heavy burden this way," went on Alasdair, "for while all the rest of the folk in the Island live only in one world, I live in two—sometimes in one and sometimes in the other. I never know when I am taken from the one into the other. And when I am in the other world I see what is going to happen in this world and what the future is going to bring. It is a heavy burden to carry."

"Alasdair," I exclaimed, "can you tell me now what my future is to be?"

"Not at this very moment," replied Alasdair, "for I am in this world and not in that other world at present."

"Do tell me," I pleaded, "just one of your visions. Tell me the last one you saw."

"Oh, calf of my heart," went on Alasdair, "when I look at you I can see myself as I was at your age. You are as like what I was as a boy, as one pea is like another. Telling you is just like telling myself. And I will break my rule and tell you the last I saw."

"I was coming back from seeing my niece at Gedintailor, walking peacefully along the road, when suddenly I felt it coming over me. It is a queer feeling—as if the earth were melting away, and you yourself dissolving into a mist. Up behind me I felt people coming and I turned, and there, coming over the ridge, I saw a host. They were marching two and two. But there wasn't a sound. As they came near, I stepped off the road and watched them march past. But never a word and never a sound did I hear."

"Were they soldiers?" I asked, quivering with excitement.

"Soldiers," he answered. "No, they weren't soldiers; for soldiers have red coats. And they were all in blue. No, they weren't soldiers. But they kept on steadily and halted not far from Tor-na-Cro (Hillock of the Nuts). I marked the very spot. And if ever you hear, Norman, my boy, of an enemy invading the Island, and coming up to the Braes, you watch if they will turn back at Tor-na-Cro, and if they will, you will know that Alasdair MacChallum was a true seer."

Alasdair glanced at Glamaig and saw that the shadow of the sinking sun required the setting out for home with the cows. Some of the wise old cows had already started going down the hill homewards. We parted at Cnoc Donn (the brown hill), and in parting Alasdair said, "Now, Norman, my young friend; remember what I told you. I may not live to see the host in blue marching to Tor-na-Cro, but every probability is that you will. If it prove to be so, you will testify to my veracity."

I promised faithfully and ran down the hill. For by this time Betty, the cow, was half-way home.

## § 4

THAT night at supper I asked my father if he knew the meaning of the name Cuchullin. He said he didn't. But my mother said that she knew; that it meant The Dog of Coolin. I asked if she knew how the name came to be so; she said that she once heard a story about that but she had forgotten and would be glad to hear it again if I could tell her, so I told the story of Saanda, just as Alasdair told it to me. My mother when I came to the end praised the tale.

"Norman, calf of my heart," said she in her Gaelic whose very sound was as a caress, "you have told the story just as I remember hearing it years ago from Callum the father of Alasdair."

"It was Alasdair who told me the story."

But my father showed a little restlessness as the tale reached its end. He began to fill his pipe with a little more than his usual deliberate movements.

"You can tell a story very well," added my mother.

Then my father gave his verdict. "I never knew any who were good at telling old stories and legends and fables who were ever good at anything else. And that story explaining the name Cuchullin is just a pure fable from beginning to end and not worthy of any serious man's consideration. I don't know what is to become of you, my boy, if you go on filling your head with foolish stories and neglecting your lessons as you do. Tales of fairies and ghosts and hounds that never existed will not earn you bread and butter."

"I've learnt my lessons for tomorrow," I replied. "I know now the names of the six wives of Henry the Eighth, and the year he married them, and the years he beheaded four of them. I can say them now."

"I'll hear that tomorrow," said he. "That is the knowledge that will be useful to you in the days to come. The dates of battles and of the reigns of Kings and Queens, that is practical knowledge; that is the undeniable truth; that is what wins credit, and not the lies which you seem determined to store in your memory."

Dates! how odd it is to remember that conversation after more than sixty years. Of all the dates I ever learned I only remember the date of the Battle of Bannockburn, of Culloden, and of Waterloo, but even these three are now slipping from me. I once knew a lot: the Battle of Hastings, the Council of Nicea, even the Battle of Marathon, but they are all gone and I am none the poorer. There is, however, this to be said for my father. He wasn't born or reared in the Island. He was

#### THE FORMER DAYS

an incomer from Lochbroom—from the district of Coigach, a place called Altandow, opposite the Summer Isles. I once asked him why these little isles were called Summer Isles. Was it because there was no winter ever there? He smiled and told me he didn't know. It was natural that, being an incomer, he should not know the meaning of Cuchullin, but it was unnatural that he should not know the meaning of the Summer Isles. But he knew all the dates in the history of the world and he could pass a whole night quite happily explaining why a few were elected to everlasting life and the vast majority of the human race were thrown into hell. That was the knowledge he excelled in. Peace be with him.

## THE CEILIDH

## § I

"TONIGHT," WHISPERED SAM IN THE SCHOOL, "there is to be a ceilidh<sup>1</sup> in Murdo the Bard's house. Will you come?"

I said that there was nothing in all the world I would like better, for of all places a ceilidh was the best place for hearing old stories of perilous deeds and ancient superstitions.

"I'll meet you outside the house in the mouth of the night, or an hour or so thereafter."

"No," said I, knowing well what an hour after nightfall or thereabout meant in an island that had little use for clocks and watches, "I'll come to your house, Sam, and we'll then go together."

Thus it came that Sam and I arrived at Murdo the Bard's house just as the neighbours had already gathered in and were comfortably seated round the fire. If you never sat in a sunag round a peat-fire glowing in the centre of a thatched house in our Island, you will never know the felicity of perfect comfort. In that old house, now long-time vanished, you entered through the byre, where two cows at night softly chewed the cud, to the fire beyond the hallan, where fifteen, sitting close, could toast their feet at the griosach. Such a scene of comfort and industry I shall never see again. For the old grandmother was carding wool and dipping her finger now and then in a bowl of fish-oil and smearing the wool as she put it on the card. And Mary the wife of Murdo was spinning, sitting at her wheel, feeding the carded wool into the spool. And two girls, Ellen and Jean, were knitting the family stockings. Sitting on stools were four boys of various ages. The one I remember best was named Charles. He was still a very little boy when on a hot summer day at Sunday School he felt utterly bored and, producing a pin, stabbed it into his neighbour. There was a yell which broke the thread of the Master's homily. When the Master asked who the transgressor was, the sufferer naturally pointed to Charles.

<sup>1</sup> A gathering of neighbours for the telling of tales. The Elders had banned songs.

"Where, Charles, will you go when you die if you behave like that?"

"To the Big Fire," replied Charles.

A little later the atmosphere of that schoolroom was unendurable to Charles, so he stabbed his neighbour on the other side with the same result.

"I ask you again, Charles," queried the teacher, "where do you expect to go when you die, behaving like that on the holy Sabbath?"

"I told you already," replied Charles: "to the Big Fire."

And there was Charles, curly-headed, blue-eyed, the picture of perfect innocence, sitting on a stool beside his father. It is strange the things one remembers. But I must not jump back and fore like this. The wise man does not try to hoe more than one row at a time, as the old saying has it. The worst of it is that when there are so many rows one wants to jump from one to another, thinking he will get on faster so. But he won't.

When Sam led the way into that charmed circle Murdo at once welcomed him. "Get a stool for Sammy," said he, "and make room for him. Is mairg a bheireadh droch mheas air ghille luideagach neo loth fheallagach" (Foolish is the man who would despise a ragged boy or a shaggy filly). And when he saw me emerging from the darkness behind Sam, "We are honoured tonight," exclaimed Murdo. "Make room also for the Master's son." And who was there but Alasdair, the uncle of Mary, Murdo's wife, the seer and teller of tales. The stool that was meant for Sam was now given to me, and I sat down at Alasdair's feet. Sam was not put out in the least by losing the stool, for he went out beyond the hallan and returned with three dry peats, which he placed one on the top of the other and thus made a stool for himself. Moving Charlie a little aside, he sat on the other side of Alasdair.

When we came in I noticed that a thick burly man in a blue suit was talking. He was a stranger to me, and his clothes had an air of the South. When we had settled down with our feet to the fire, the stranger resumed his talk.

## § 2

"IN this Island you have been treated shamefully," said the man in the blue suit. "You have, here, in these townships your grazings taken from you—grazings that your ancestors had from the olden times—and given to a man named Mackay. Now what right has a Mackay in this Island? The Mackays ought to stay in their own country and not come here stealing the grazings of Macdonalds and MacLeods and Mackinnons. Mackays indeed—a low class Mackays!"

"There were some fine men among the Mackays," interrupted Alasdair, looking straight at the stranger.

"Name one," said the stranger.

"There was Rob Donn," replied Alasdair; "and that reminds me of what Rob Donn said to Mr. Souter, the minister of Thurso, who was a man of many gifts but lazy withal. 'Well, Rob,' said Mr. Souter, 'how is your new minister getting on at Tongue?' 'He is doing what nobody will ever say of you, Mr. Souter,' answered Rob Donn, 'he is doing his best.'"

— There was a silence for a moment such as follows a thunderclap.

"And I must say, Mr. Nicolson," went on Alasdair, "that you are doing your best."

The stranger must have been speaking for some time before Sam and I came in, for he had not said anything in our hearing that merited praise from Alasdair or anybody else.

"What I say," he resumed, a trifle disconcerted, "is that it is a scandal and a shame that Ben Lee should be taken by Lord Macdonald from the people. Did Lord Macdonald create Ben Lee that he should exercise lordship over it, taking it from one and giving it to another? And that he should give it to an incomer, a stranger, a Mackay, is adding insult to injury."

"Stop a moment," said Alasdair; "you are doing fine, but I would like to ask you a question. You are a Nicolson; now, do you know how the Nicolsons came to the Island?"

"We have been in the Island as long as anybody else," said the stranger.

"No, you have not," answered Alasdair, "and I can tell you the facts as I had them from my grandfather, who was a truthful man and never told a lie. The Nicolsons were a clan settled in Assynt, and a misfortune fell on them, for their Chief died leaving no son—just a daughter. Now the Chiefs of the MacLeods of Lewis were clever men; and the lands they could not get by the sword they planned to get by marriage. I was told by George the scholar that a family called Bourbon got almost all the Kingdoms of Europe by clever marriages; the MacLeods were like that. An old Chief in Stornoway made a marriage treaty with MacRaid of Dunvegan that his son should marry MacRaid's only child, and by marriage they got Dunvegan. And to another the old Chief gave Raasay: and another son the old Chief married to the daughter of the Chief of the Nicolsons in Assynt. But when the old Chief died in Assynt the daughter and her husband succeeded, but the clan rose in rebellion. They would not have a MacLeod to rule over them—not a MacLeod from a remote island full of peat-bogs such

as Lewis. So they put their gear and their cattle into their boats and made for our Island."

As half the population of the townships on the slopes of Ben Lee are Nicolsons, every eye was fixed on Alasdair. Even the whirr of the wheel ceased and Granny's carding stopped.

"What happened to them, Uncle?" asked Mary.

"They put the cattle ashore at Portree," went on Alasdair, "and the chief man among them, who was a cousin of the Chief who died and who by Celtic law should have succeeded, only the MacLeods got the better of him, hurried to the Chief of Clan Donald, who was then in his castle at Duntulm, and told him what evils he and his clan had suffered at the hands of the MacLeods; and he begged a refuge in the Island. Now Lord Macdonald was then at war with MacLeod of Dunvegan, and right ready he was to show favour to any who hated the MacLeods. So he welcomed the poor, landless refugees from Assynt and gave them Scurrybreck on condition that they served him in the wars. And there the Nicolsons multiplied like rabbits, until today the Nicolsons have most of the crofts and farms and offices of profit in the Island. But they are just incomers."

"That is news to me," put in the stranger, "and glad am I always to get reliable information. Every man should know about his ancestors. But since the Chief of the Nicolsons went to Australia a hundred years ago we have forgotten our own history. When was it all this happened?"

"Give me a moment to think," said Alasdair, who began to count up the generations of the great Clan Donald of which he was so proud to be a member. I have already written Alasdair's name as Mac-Challum, but that is only the Celtic way of calling a man by his father's Christian name. It means *Alasdair the son of Callum*, but the surname was Macdonald.

"So far as I can count up the years and the generations," resumed Alasdair, "the Nicolsons came to the Island from Assynt, escaping from the usurpation of the MacLeods, three hundred and sixty years ago."

Sam is a Nicolson, and he looked at me round the knees of Alasdair, and the lid of his left eye gently drooped.

"Are we incomers yet, Alasdair?" he asked softly.

"After three hundred and sixty years!" echoed the stranger. "Surely not incomers at the end of that."

"Yes, incomers," exclaimed Alasdair, "for what is three hundred and sixty years in the record of the history of the world but just as yesterday when it is past and a watch in the night? If incomers are

to be denied grazings and land, then all the Nicolsons must clear out and leave the Island to the Macdonalds."

"What about the Macdonalds?" asked the stranger.

"The Macdonalds were the Kings of the Isles for a thousand years," exclaimed Alasdair, his voice rising in excitement. "They made alliances with the Kings and Queens of Europe; they fought on the right at Bannockburn, and when they defeated the English they gave the mainland of Scotland to the Bruce. They are a royal race and not incomers like the Nicolsons."

— Murdo the Bard gave a snort, but by a great effort restrained his tongue, for he stood in awe of his wife's uncle. The rest of the Nicolsons at the ceilidh got very restive. There were also two MacLeods, Ian Dubh and Seumas Ruadh, and if looks could kill, Alasdair would be very short-lived.

"This dispute about my clan," smoothed out Murdo, "arose from a factor, whose name was Mackinnon, as you all know, taking the grazings of Ben Lee unrighteously from us. The present factor, a Macdonald, has rented Ben Lee to a Mackay. That is a mere accident. His name might be Smith or Gow, but the fact would be the same. I think we should hear what our new friend, Mr. Nicolson, has to say to us. We all admit, as he has just come to the Island, that he is an incomer."

"We all agree on that point," said Alasdair. And a general laugh restored a friendly feeling.

By this time the stranger began to realise that he had better not abuse the Chief of the Clan Donald or any other Chief. So he veered his sail and set his course on another tack.

"Consider," he said, "what the result would be if the land were restored to its rightful owners. Nobody would need to leave this beautiful island and go to seek a living on the hard paving-stones of Glasgow or Greenock. It is I who know what a flinty stepmother the big town can be, and how hungry one can be walking its stony streets. But if the land were yours, you would build up a new civilization. You would need craftsmen for skilled labour: shoemakers, masons, blacksmiths, tailors, joiners. Your sons would learn these trades. The foundation of everything is, however, the land. Get possession of the land and you will soon find yourselves in the golden age the prophets have so often foretold."

At this there was a general murmur of approval. Even the very smoke, curling up to the soot-coated rafters, gathering itself together to escape by the barrel with both ends knocked out that led to the open air, took on a golden tinge as the stranger painted the rosy picture of the future.



"Only get the land for your own and the rest will follow," emphasised the stranger.

But Red William (now, alas! getting grey) at that found his voice.

"How are we going to support all these workers?" he asked.

"By the produce of the land," was the answer.

"That indeed would be a miracle," said William, "for last summer when I sold my wool I did not get enough money for it to pay for the smearing and the dipping and the clipping of the sheep."

"When you get the hill back again, you will have more sheep," argued the stranger.

"My loss would be all the greater," said William.

"If you lose like that," asked the stranger, "how do you make a living?"

They hadn't asked themselves that fundamental question before. How was it they lived without going hungry?

"I will tell you that," said Alasdair the Seer, rapping the hearth-stone with his stick. "We are unlike the towns. They flourish by exporting the work of their hands—Glasgow by building ships for the world; Dundee by manufacturing jute bags for the world; Paisley by making thread for the world. We, unlike them, live by exporting men and women. What's jute or thread compared to exporting men and women?"

The stranger was, at this, taken aback.

"If you export your sons and daughters you lose them," said the stranger.

"Lose them!" echoed Alasdair. "That's nonsense. Every one of them becomes as good as a gold-mine. Look at Murdo there, the husband of my niece. He has now a family of eight and he is not finished yet. But with every child that is born to him Murdo feels as if he had put a hundred pounds safely in the bank. And the girls are better than the sons. For the girl never forgets her mother, and from Glasgow or London every half-year the girl sends her wages to her mother. And the sons too, till they marry. When that happens it is like the coal-seams in the mines that suddenly end. No, it isn't by sheep or cattle we live here in the Island; it is by exporting the men and women that are building up the Empire from the Macdonald Mountains in Canada to the MacLeod Range in Australia."

There was a loud murmur of approval at this outburst of Alasdair's. The stranger's face set in a frown. He felt that the atmosphere had become chilly.

"Excuse me," said he, very correct and formal, "for I promised to look in at Hector's on my way back to Camustinavaig, and I must

be going." He waved his hand to us, and Murdo saw him out through the hallan with the light of a blazing peat which he lifted with the tongs from the fire.

"He has gone away like a man with a flea in his ear," remarked Murdo as he returned smiling. "But nobody else will move for another hour; and Alasdair will no doubt tell us a story."

"Who is your new friend?" asked Alasdair.

"His name is Peter Nicolson," replied Murdo, "and from what I can gather, he was reared in the island of Mull."

"I can well believe it," said Alasdair, "for the old rann has been proved true by every generation:

*Ileach, 's Mullach, 's deamhain,  
An tri 's miosa 's an domhain.  
'S miosa 'n Ileach na Mullach,  
'S miosa a Mullach na 'n deamhain.*

"I think," explained Murdo, "that he has been sent to the Islands by the new Land League formed in Glasgow and that he is in their pay."

"The Glasgow Land League!" exclaimed Alasdair. "Who are they but Fenians, Socialists, Papists and Irish scallywags? That entirely explains Mr. Peter Nicolson."

There was a stir in the ceilidh as when the sky suddenly clears in a cloudy day. A change of subject was evidently needed. Sam voiced the new atmosphere.

"Tell us a story," said he to Alasdair.

"What sort of a story would you like?" responded Alasdair. "A story about the old, old days; about the Feinn; or a story of our own generation?"

The general request was for a story of our own generation.

"Ah well," said Alasdair, "it is natural that the young should ask a story regarding the days that are. For the days that now are will soon be the days that are to be. Did anyone at this ceilidh ever hear the story of the last Chief of Raasay's piano?" Nobody evidently had, or if any did hear it, they were ready to hear it again. So Alasdair began his sgeulachd.

### § 3

"THE last Chief of Raasay, John MacLeod, claimed to be Chief of the whole Clan MacLeod. Nobody knows whether that was so or not. It all turns on which of two brothers was the older: for MacLeod of Lewis gave Raasay to one son and arranged that another son marry the heiress of MacRaid of Dunvegan. Now, in solving a problem

such as that I always ask what I would do myself in such a situation. Suppose I were the Chief of Lewis and wanted to provide for my sons, would it be the older or the younger that I would marry to an heiress? What does the company think I would do?"

"You would undoubtedly marry the younger son to the heiress," answered Murdo the Bard, "for the elder son would succeed yourself."

"It is a real joy," exclaimed Alasdair, "to see one's own wisdom reflected back in the faces of others. And I see you agree with me that the wise Chief of Lewis married his younger son to the heiress of Dunvegan; and if that was so, then John MacLeod of Raasay was the Chief of the whole Clan MacLeod; for the MacLeods of Lewis came there to an end."

A murmur of approval went round the ceilidh; and Alasdair, warmed by the genial atmosphere, launched out on his tale with renewed spirit.

"The Chief of Raasay was in one respect a most fortunate man, for he had ten daughters born to him, and beautiful ladies they were. They had only to appear at a ball in Edinburgh, and suitors would be on their knees to them immediately. Everybody knows the piobareachd, 'Salute to Lady Hastings'—or they did before the new religion came that said that the music of the piper was of the devil. I never agreed to that myself, but that is quite a different story. She married Lord Hastings, who became Viceroy of India. Just think of a young lady brought up under Dun Can, in an island where the folk are so backward that they say 'The herring is good enough when we cannot get cuddies'—think of her going out to India, there to queen it over ancient royal houses and over queens without number. And the youngest of all married a son of the tenant of the Isle of Scalpay who became a minister, and she had a son John, called after the Chief of Raasay, who became a famous minister and was deposed by the Assembly of the Church."

"What did he do wrong to merit that?" asked Murdo.

"So far as I could understand, it was this. He taught that God loved all men; and that our blessed Lord died for all men. Now the Assembly could not endure that. It was intolerable to them that God should love Papists and Episcopalians and those who persecuted the Covenanters; they wanted God to love themselves alone, so they put the grandson of the Chief of Raasay out of the Church with great ignominy."

"Quite right," said Ian Dubh, "for he evidently hadn't the right principles if he taught that God loves Papists."

"The right principles!" exclaimed Alasdair. "The only principle I know is what is written in the Blessed Book, 'God so loved the

world . . . ' I love all my children, be they good or bad, and God is infinitely nobler than I am. It is strange to think that if the Chief of Raasay had been content with nine daughters, John MacLeod Campbell would never have been born; and we would still be happy in the belief that God only loves ourselves."

"That shows," said Red William, "how careful we ought to be in the matter of increasing the number of daughters."

"You are diverting me from my real story, for my tale is not about the grandson of the Chief of Raasay, but about the piano which he bought for his ten daughters. When he was going to Edinburgh Lady Raasay asked him to buy a piano. For the girls must be taught music, else how can they take their rightful place in the world of fashion when the time comes?

"So the Chief bought a piano in Glasgow—a spinet mounted on four legs. The legs were taken off, and the spinet was packed in a crate and put on the steamer at the Broomielaw in Glasgow to be delivered in Raasay.

"On the same steamer was placed another crate, very much the same as the crate containing the spinet. But inside this crate was a coffin containing the body of Finlay the Piper, who had laid it as a last command on his family that his body be buried with his ancestors at Portree. Finlay the Piper had left the Island because he fell into disgrace: he would not stop playing the pipes though the Elders condemned that ungodly ploy: and when he was put under a ban Finlay shook the dust of the Island off his feet and went to Glasgow. There he prospered exceedingly, so that when he died his body was put in a grand polished oak coffin and enclosed in a crate and put on board the steamer for Portree."

"But why did they put the coffin in a crate?" asked Mary, who had stopped spinning, entranced by this tale though she had been wearied by the previous talk. "I never heard of a coffin in a crate. It sounds a fairy-tale."

"Not so," answered Alasdair. "It was put into a crate right enough, and the reason was this: before the schoolmasters came to the Island and taught the people that the world is round and goes rushing round the sun instead of the sun round it, the people were full of idle superstitions. One of these was that it was most unlucky to carry a dead man in a ship. As the sailors on the steamer were mostly from the Island, they would refuse to sail with a coffin in the ship, so the dead man in the coffin was hid by a crate.

"Now what happened at Glachan, Raasay, when the steamer arrived would never have happened were it not for the time of the year. It

was the last night of the year when the ferry-boat came out to meet the steamer. And you know in those days it was not considered right that anyone should bid farewell to the old year without many a deoch, slainte.<sup>1</sup> It was the right thing, and everybody in those days was careful to do the right thing.

"The last night of the year is specially dangerous to ships sailing among the Isles. If you hear of ships driven on rocks, of drowned passengers and lost seamen, it most often happens on the last night of the year. I find no fault with the sailors; but at any rate, when the crate that was supposed to contain the piano was opened in the big room in the Chief's house at Clachan the young ladies fainted and Lady Raasay was carried to her bed in a fit. But the future Lady Hastings, who ruled as a Queen over India, soon rallied her nine sisters and bore them off to a room at the top of the big house, where she set them to play a game. . . ."

"What had happened?" asked Red William.

"Need you ask?" was the reply. "The sailors, celebrating the old year as they were right in doing, handed down into the ferry-boat the wrong crate."

"And what happened to the piano?" asked Mary.

"I am just coming to that," resumed Alasdair. "You are so impatient. You are like my grandson who when he gets a story-book reads the first few pages and then the last few pages. He can't wait; he must know at once how the story ends. The end of the story is just as you might expect. The friends of Finlay the Piper assembled in Portree for the funeral. The steamer was late. It was the last day of the year, as I said, and it hung heavy on their hands. But the Caledonian Hotel was there. They spent much of the day under its hospitable roof. That was a grand place in its day. The third cousin of my wife, Bean a Chaledonian, was hospitality and kindness itself. When in the gloaming the steamer came, the mourners found that Wentworth Street was not quite so broad as it used to be. They never so much as noticed anything different from the usual shape in the supposed coffin. There wasn't really much difference in shape. They bore it, in as good an order as could be expected on the last night of the year, to the churchyard and lowered it in the grave which had been prepared.

"Then the first spade of soil was thrown in on the coffin. . . . And out of the grave there came a musical sound . . . bing . . . bing. The sexton dropped the spade. The mourners stepped back from the grave. 'Heaven help us,' cried Calum Uisdean, 'Finlay is playing the pipes in his coffin.'

<sup>1</sup> Toast honoured in whisky.

"'Oh, you amadan,'<sup>1</sup> cried a mourner, 'that wasn't the sound of the pipes. It was a wail of agony.'

"They rushed to the Caledonian to renew their courage. One said one thing and one another. The policeman was summoned; he brought the doctor; they went back to the graveyard. The doctor took charge, and got the coffin brought up out of the grave. In the light of a lantern dimly burning the lid was prised open. And there was the piano of the last Chief of Raasay, the piano on which the future 'Queen of India' learned to play the reels and strathspeys with which she delighted the rajahs and princes of India."

"What happened to Finlay the Piper?" asked Mary.

"Need you ask? A boat with four oars brought Finlay the Piper on the first day of the New Year to Portree. The Chief of Raasay sent his best boat with the coffin. And in the evening they buried him beside his ancestors with all due honour and respect. And that night there was in Portree a funeral celebration such as the Island had not known since the day when no funeral was deemed respectable unless there were half a dozen good fights after it. When the new dispensation came to the Island and all sorts of good old customs were put under the ban, including even the music of the bagpipes, fighting after a funeral came to an end. Peggie Nighean Uisdean, when they told her that there wasn't a single fight after the burial of her husband, exclaimed, 'John is buried and not a bloody head in the churchyard. Shame is on me, for they will say of me that I spared the whisky at my husband's funeral.' That's how times change. What is an honour with one generation becomes a disgrace with the next. But the funeral of Finlay the Piper was long remembered: for that night six slept soundly in the cells of the new prison in Portree. Yes, in very truth, the funeral of Finlay the Piper was the end of that dispensation."

#### § 4

ALASDAIR was warmly praised and thanked by everybody. The ceilidh which at the beginning looked as if it might end in quarrels and fisticuffs closed with the greatest harmony. Macdonalds, MacLeods, and Nicolsons were once more like brothers. Murdo lifted another blazing peat from the fire and lighted for the visitors the way beyond the hallan to the outer door. The stars were shining brightly and a half-moon lit up the Sound of Raasay.

"Sam," said I, "you must come with me past the Cumhag; for after that story of the piper's funeral I can't face it alone."

<sup>1</sup> Fool.

The Cumhag was certainly one of the loneliest spots imaginable. There the road narrowed and passed through a declivity. One step over the edge and you would be hurled down a couple of hundred feet on the rocks at the shore. At the mouth of that narrow defile an old woman lived in a bothy which was almost round. There were two remarkable things regarding her. She alone in that wide district kept pigeons: and the pigeons were deemed unfriendly in that they muttered to every stranger, "Cha de mo chuideachd thu" (You are not of my community). And the other was that she sold smuggled whisky that came from Gairloch. Red William said it was the best whisky he ever tasted, for he felt after a glass of it as if a red burning ember had gone down his throat. . . . Only a short time before, "Bean a Chumhaig" had departed, universally lamented, to a better land where, as Murdoch said, the climate would not necessitate smuggled cheer. And the pedestrian who passed that way at night heard strange and weird noises from her now empty house.

Sam at once agreed to see me safely past the danger zone. And when we came near the old woman's bothy he took my hand and we raced past it like the wind, never glancing behind, but feeling that a dark menace lay there. So we came to the top of the steep brae leading down to the schoolhouse.

"You are quite safe now," said Sam, "and I'll leave you."

Instantly it flashed on me how selfish I had been, for Sam would now have to face all the terrors of going back alone.

"Oh, Sam," I cried, "I am afraid I've been selfish: for now you will have to go back alone through the Cumhag."

"That won't frighten me," said Sam. "I heard Granny say, 'Dinna meddle with ghosts and ghosts will not meddle with you.' I won't meddle with Bean a Chumhaig if we meet. But we won't."

And he began to run back. And as he came near the house of the old woman who was gone he ran all the faster. For though Sam said he did not believe in ghosts, yet he ran faster when he came to the silent house.

I found my mother sitting up waiting for me. All the rest had gone to sleep.

"You gave me a fright," said she, "staying so long at the ceilidh."

"Do you know the story of the funeral of Finlay the Piper?" I asked.

"I don't know it in full," she replied, "but I think I heard that they began to bury a piano in his grave."

"I'll tell you the full story tomorrow," said I, for sleep was closing my eyes.

That night I awoke, screaming, from a nightmare. I dreamed that I was at a funeral and as I stood beside the grave the first spadeful of earth was thrown in and from the grave there rose a cry—a moan—the cry of a sea-bird mingled with the moan of the wind as it comes from the west round the corner of the house, all mixed up together, unearthly and dreadful. The mourners fled from the grave and I was there unable to move, listening to the moaning from the grave. At last it was myself who was there in the coffin crying and sobbing aloud. I remember now the glad joy that flooded my veins when I awoke and found myself safe in bed.

"I am still alive in Ollach," I said to myself, "and not dead in Portree." And I turned over and slept like a stone till dawn.



## AN DOTAIR BAN

## § 1

THE WINTER OF 1881-1882 was long remembered because of the storms and rain that seemed never to cease. The previous summer was so wet that the peat could not be dried. The scanty harvest had rotted on the slopes. And to make the misery complete, the herring shoals deserted the bays and lochs. It is remarkable that no one has as yet discovered why herring suddenly leave a sea-coast and after a few years as suddenly return. It so happened that the sea proved as barren as the soil on that doleful year of which I write. It is difficult to have a ceildh when the peat on the hearth only gives smoke but no flame and warmth; difficult to be cheerful when potatoes and salt form the main diet; and difficult not to use bitter words when the rent falls due and there is no money to pay.

The only man who never complained was the old seannachie, Alasdair MacChallum. When anyone complained to Alasdair of the weather, his invariable reply was: "Thig tide math fathasd" (Good weather will come yet). And when Uileam Ruadh said that the end of all things had come because the herring had departed and the fish had gone from the sea, Alasdair rebuked him gently: "Thig an sgadan fathasd," said he. With Alasdair everything was "fathasd"—good fortune, good health, good food: they all would come "fathasd." "Thig biadh math fathasd," he would say to his daughter when she said she was sorry that she had no better to give.

At last, when the bitter winter was drawing to an end, and suddenly the sun shone and the light danced on the crests of the waves in the Sound of Raasay, on a day that proclaimed the return of the promise of Nature's bounty, Murdo the Bard met Alasdair on the road. Murdo complained of the sad winter the people had endured, Alasdair looked at the sea and hills bathed in golden sunshine and said:

"Did I not often say when the days were gloomy, 'Gu'n thigeadh tide math fathasd'?" (that good weather would come yet).

"Fathasd," exclaimed Murdo, feeling irritated by an overdose of

optimism. "Fathasd! The name that you ought to bear is Alasdair Fathasd."

"My name," said Alasdair, "is that of the royal Clan Donald, but you are welcome to call me whatever you like."

Within a few hours the story passed from house to house how the bard had named Alasdair MacChallum—Alasdair Fathasd. And so Alasdair came to be known far and wide until that wonderful day arrived when Alasdair received a white stone on which a new name was written which none knows but He who gives it and he who receives it.

## § 2

IT was in the course of that winter that the bard became so discontented with his house that he resolved to build a new one. "Master," he would say to my father when they met, "I have made up my mind to build a new house. The family is still growing. I have already eight, God bless them; and there is another in the loom. It is not right that a great family such as mine should be housed under the same roof as the cattle. It is a shame to me that it should be so. I must build a new house."

"In these hard times," said the schoolmaster, "that will be difficult to do."

"Oh no," replied the bard. "My father was a mason, and I know how to build the walls. There is any amount of stone on the ground. All I need is wood. And I am going to see the new factor in Portree to ask permission to cut down three or four trees to provide rafters. Oh yes. I shall soon have a new house worthy of my eight children to say nothing of the one in the loom."

That night I heard my father tell my mother how the bard had told him of the child in the loom and how sorry he was for Mary the bard's wife, who already had more burdens to carry than anybody on the Island.

"Nonsense," replied my mother. "Mary is more fortunate than any in the six townships. If you have twelve or fourteen children, you can be sure that two or three of them will have the gifts which will make a success of life. Mary will be rich in her old age. There can never be too many children. God never sends a mouth without also sending food."

So on a day between weathers, as we called the occasional good days that came sandwiched between the bad, the bard set out for Portree to see the new factor and arrange for the trees that would supply the rafters and beams for the new house, and everybody he met on the

road he told of his errand, so that when he was past the brae at Camus-tinavaig and saw Portree gleaming with white walls nestling on the slopes of the beautiful bay, he saw clear as day the walls of his new house and the warm thatch on its roof and his children playing on the hillock before its door. There wasn't a happier man in the Island than Murdo the Bard when he arrived at the factor's office. After a little delay he found himself in the inner room facing the factor, who sat behind a big desk. And Murdo described the room afterwards with perfect accuracy, for his roving eyes never missed anything.

"There was a pleasant perfume in the room such as you would feel in a room where there was a perfectly dried calf-skin, and along the wall were tin boxes, and each tin box was just the size of a child's coffin. Calf-skins and coffins, that was what came into my mind, and there behind a desk sat the factor with a round head, far too big for his body. But clever men have big heads, and factors are clever men. There never was a soil so poor but that factors and dockans would flourish on it. Yes, factors are clever: they get rich anywhere.

"Well, Murdo,' says he to me in good Gaelic, 'what is it that you wish me to do for you this morning?'

"So I told him how I had eight children and another in the loom.

"What?' said he, looking sharply at me. 'That is the queerest thing I've heard for many a day. Do you mean to tell me that you are keeping a child in a loom. There is a society,' says he, 'whose work is prevention of cruelty to children, and we have a branch of it here in Portree. I must draw their attention to your child kept in a loom!'

"At that I laughed and laughed so that I could not stop.

"What do you mean,' asked he, 'coming into my office to waste my time with senseless laughter like that?'

"I then told him what I meant by a child in the loom. And it was his turn to laugh. And then he became quite serious and a hungry look came into his eyes. At that I remembered that he was childless and I thought that I made a mistake in speaking of the loom.

"The good things of this world,' said he, 'are very unequally divided.' And there was a moment's silence in that little room and I again became conscious of the calf-skins and the tin coffins. And I asked myself—Which is the rich man: the factor childless or I with eight and more coming?

"But you did not come here to tell me that,' said he.

"No,' said I, 'but I came to ask a great favour.' And then I told him of my plan to build a new house and I asked permission to cut down trees for rafters and beams:

"Then he rang a bell on his desk and a smart girl appeared.

"Bring me the rent-book," said he.

"And she soon opened before him a big book full of names and figures. And he glanced at it silently for a little while.

"I see that you have not paid your rent for three years," said he, looking sharply at me.

"Well," I replied, 'a poor man cannot do everything. He cannot rear up soldiers for the Queen and pay his rent at the same time. You wait, and in a few years, when my sons and daughters are working, I shall pay off the arrears and the interest as well.'

— "Then he was silent a moment again.

"Well, Murdo," says he, 'I wish I could do what you ask. But the trees are not mine. They belong to Lord Macdonald, and he has grown them for ornaments and not for sale. I am very sorry I cannot give you the trees.'

"You won't give me the trees!" I exclaimed, vexed and disappointed.

"No," he said. 'I would if I could, but it is beyond my power.'

"Now, knowing what factors can do in the way of mischief, I completely lost my temper and my good manners departed from me, and I made for the door. But at the door I turned and, looking straight at him, I said, 'Mr. Macdonald,' says I, 'you are the fourth factor that I have seen managing his Lordship's estates; and the remarkable thing about these factors was that every one of them was worse than the one before: long may you live, Mr. Macdonald.'

"At that I opened the door and was half-way through it when I heard him calling me back.

"Murdo," says he, 'you are doing your duty by the Queen, raising soldiers for her; and I have no doubt but that, in due time, you will do your duty by Lord Macdonald. Here's a sovereign for you to help you buy rafters for the new house.'

"And he handed me a gold sovereign out of his purse."

Needless to say, the bard did not build a new house. He did not so much as clear the site. Twenty-five years passed before that house was built. But that story must wait its turn. Meanwhile Murdo went on doing his duty by Queen Victoria. The child in the loom turned out to be another soldier of the Queen.

That conversation between Murdo the Bard and Alexander Macdonald the newly-appointed factor for the Macdonald Estates became a much-discussed subject round the peat-fires for weeks. Wherever he was, Murdo, on the least encouragement, told the story. I heard him tell it at least four times, and the telling never varied. I have no means of knowing how much of the conversation was really authentic

and how much the product of Murdo's vivid imagination. A great after-dinner speaker once said deprecatingly to me, when I expressed appreciation of a speech which in its perfect mingling of grave and gay was such as after-dinner speeches should always be, "Oh no, it was not so good as I would have wished: I always make my best points after I sit down." During the six miles' walk home, on a perfect spring evening, with a gold sovereign in his pocket, he, no doubt, composed his story, and decorated it as he wished. When he got home he told it to Mary just as he told it, without a variation, again and again. That is no proof of its accuracy, however; it only proves that it crystallised so in his mind. There was no doubt whatever regarding the gold sovereign: for Murdo handed that to Mary on his return, and he told that part with a dramatic effect that carried conviction. The first time I heard him tell it was to my father and mother and Alasdair the Seannachie, who happened to have called in to get the news of the world, especially of the murdering land-leaguers in Ireland.

When Murdo told his story, word for word, as I have told it, "Have you made up your mind," asked my father, "as to who is the richer man—the factor or yourself?"

"As to that, Master," replied Murdo, "a great many things have to be considered. So far as this world's goods are concerned, no doubt the factor is richer. He never has to eat a dinner of potatoes and salt, and soft, half rotten potatoes at that. He never has to rig up a sail above his bed to keep the rain from dripping on him through the thatch; he never goes shivering through the day because the damp sodden peat refuse to give any heat; he never has a fear about tomorrow's food, as his meal kist is always full or he can fill it when he list. On that score the factor is far, far richer than I am. In an argument between an empty stomach and a full one, there is no chance whatever for the empty—as the old saying is."

"You have made it very plain," said my father.

"There is another side to it, Master," went on Murdo. "The factor has no children, and I have eight and another in the loom. There is no saying how many more Providence will give me, for Mary is still quite young. Now there is no saying what these sons of mine may do. One of them may be a great soldier like Sir Colin Campbell, and win a kingdom; one may go to India and make a fortune like Gesto's son who has left thousands of pounds to build a hospital at Edinbane; one may even become Prime Minister, who knows? Now, think of it this way, Master. Each one of these twelve or thirteen or fourteen children of mine will doubtless marry and each will have children. Not so many as Mary and I have, but say an average of eight.

That will mean that I will have a hundred grandchildren and the factor will have none! Which of us two will be the rich man then?"

"No doubt about it, Murdo, you will turn out to be the richer of the two. A great writer wrote a book not long ago proving the very words that you just said. 'There is no wealth but life' are the very words he uses. I read them in the *Scotsman* the other day."

"Ah!" said Murdo, radiating satisfaction at every pore, "I am not the only wise man in the world. Sometimes I doubt my own wisdom, for when wise things come into my mind I often say to myself, Are you really a wise man, Murdo? If you were a wise man would you be living on potatoes and salt? But after this I'll never doubt my own wisdom. Who is the other wise man who said that?"

"John Ruskin, a professor in a place called Oxford."

"A professor!" exclaimed Murdo. "An undoubtedly learned and wise man, and I'll never doubt my own wisdom after this."

"But there are other riches," said Alasdair the Seannachie, speaking as if he had just wakened out of a dream. "There is such a thing as being poor in this world but rich towards God. This world passes away and the generations thereof. But neither moth nor rust can ever affect the riches of those who are rich towards God. This life is as but a moment, but we shall be dead for ever and ever. The only riches are those that we can carry through death into the Tir nan Og."<sup>1</sup>

"You are right," said Murdo, his face suddenly changing into a tenderness that transfigured it. "The only riches is the inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away."

"That," said my father, "is beyond any contradiction. A great coalmaster who gave hundreds of thousands of pounds to the Church was talking not long ago to a friend who never gave away a shilling if he could help it.

"What is the use of your piling up masses of gold?" said the coalmaster. 'You cannot take it with you. And if you did, it would melt.'"

At that there was a momentary hush. Was it really polite to intrude so grim a subject at a time such as this? Melting! that was too much. But Murdo recovered himself in a moment and laughed. "That, Master," said he, "is the best I've heard for a long time."

"You were lucky, Murdo," said Alasdair, "when you got a gold piece from the factor."

"Wasn't I!" responded Murdo, smiling broadly. "His father wouldn't have given me a farthing."

"His father," put in my mother, "when he came to the Island was poor as you are yourself. Often did I hear the story told when I was

<sup>1</sup> Land of eternal youth.

a girl how he walked from Dingwall to Portree. There was no railway then. His father died when he passed as a lawyer, and there was little money over."

"They always have half a crown in their pockets when they arrive in London to make their fortunes," murmured my father.

"He had far better than that," went on my mother. "He had knowledge and character. The people soon discovered how clever he was. He gained such confidence that at last he could turn the very stories into silver and gold."

"That is what the proverb says: a handful of skill is better than a handful of gold," said Alasdair. "What puzzles me, is how his son could ever give a gold sovereign to our friend, Murdo. For that he gave the sovereign is beyond doubt or cavilling."

"You surely don't doubt the rest of my story," said Murdo reproachfully.

"Not at all, Murdo," explained Alasdair. "A good story, well told, is always true. If the story be not true in the material world, it is true in that world of the mind which composed it and so made it. I often think when I tell a story that it may not be true in fact, but then it is true in my mind. In this world of shadows, what is important is the truth of mind."

"I can explain how he gave the sovereign," broke in my mother, hastening to nip the dispute in the bud. "It was his grandfather that suddenly stirred in him and made him give that sovereign."

"His grandfather?" said my father, who, as an incomer, knew nothing of the real history of the Island. "Not his father's father?"

"Not at all," answered my mother. "Nobody knows anything about that good man. It is enough that he was of the royal blood of the Clan Donald, of which every clansman is the equal of princes. It was his mother's father, an Dotair Ban, that stirred in the factor's heart."

At that Alasdair's face beamed. Here was a congenial topic for a tale: an Dotair Ban (the fair-haired Physician).

"It was the Dotair Ban who made a rich man of Harry," interjected Alasdair.

"That is true," went on my mother, warming to her tale. "For at that time an Dotair Ban (Dr. Alex. MacLeod) was factor to Lord Macdonald and his word was law throughout the Island. And he had many daughters. When old Harry (then young Harry) came to Portree, his eyes no sooner saw the Dotair Ban's family, and his mind no sooner grasped the power wielded by him as factor, than he made up his mind to marry one of his daughters."

"Do not marry for money, but go where money is," murmured my father.

"Go where money is!" exclaimed my mother. "It wasn't so in this case, for an Dotair Ban had thousands of pounds sterling going through his hands but he could never keep a shilling for himself. He was always giving away his money to the poor. He had a big family and a big heart. He could not resist the pleading of the widow nor the cry of the orphan. But Harry did well for himself by marrying the factor's daughter. For immediately all the Macdonald Estates' money went to Harry's bank; and all the Macdonald Estates' law business went to his office; and in a short time Harry was the most prosperous man in the Island."

"No doubt it was an Dotair Ban who made him," said Murdo, "and it was really an Dotair Ban who in his grandson gave me the sovereign."

"An Dotair Ban," said Alasdair, "was always giving sovereigns away. When I was a lump of a boy my aunt, then a young woman, fell very ill and nothing would content her but that an Dotair Ban must come and see her. He came and found her in a room with the window made fast so that it could not open; and every hole and crevice stuffed with wool so that no fresh air could enter. When the doctor came in he came to a halt half-way to the bed. 'The air of this room,' said he, 'is horrible; it can be cut with a knife. Let us open the window.' But the window would not open. But before he would examine my aunt, the doctor wrenched the window open, and put the door wide open, and so got a draught through the room. My mother went out of the room muttering, 'He'll kill her.' Then he examined my aunt and said, 'What you need is fresh milk and fresh air and sunshine. You must get outside as soon as you can.' And he sent her a bottle which she was to take only every second day because it was 'so powerful,' he said.

"He came back after a week and found the window stuck fast, firmer than before, and the air was thick and foul as ever. This time he never said a word, but he went up to the window and drove his stick through each of the four panes of glass.

"When he was going away he put a sovereign on the table and said to my grandfather, 'That will pay for mending the window later on.'

"Oh, doctor," exclaimed my grandfather, 'I will give you back the sovereign when I pay you.'

"May I live until you pay me," said he, and went out laughing. He knew perfectly that my grandfather could never pay him, and that



if he lived till he received payment he would be immortal. That was an Dotair Ban to the marrow."

"Did your aunt recover?" asked my mother.

"Yes, of course," replied Alasdair, "but it was strange medicine an Dotair Ban gave her. Whenever she began to get strength he ordered her to go to the well every morning before she ate any food and drink three tumblers of water and immediately thereafter go up to the top of the Sithean near the house, turn to the east and fill her lungs with air, three times, gulping down the air until she felt like bursting. Between each filling of her lungs with the air she was to bow three times to the east. 'Remember, Ann, what I tell you: Three full tumblers of water at the well before food; three big lungful of air on the top of Sithean with three curtsies to the east between each, for three is a sacred number as the three Persons in the Trinity teach us. So remember, three times!' In three months, what between the fresh air and the fresh water from the well, and bowing three times, she was as strong as ever. She married and had sons and daughters and lived a happy life, all because an Dotair Ban drove his stick through the four panes of glass in that window. I have myself been a believer in fresh air ever since."

"He was far ahead of his own day; for that fresh-air treatment is now the one cure for consumption," said my father.

"But he did not always succeed, clever though he was," objected Murdo, making a re-entry, "for you remember, Alasdair, the wife of Calum the son of Donald son of John son of Ewen, who was convinced that she had a frog inside her. Well, an Dotair Ban got her laid on a mattress before the fire; he went through mysterious movements with his hands under a sheet. Then he placed his hand in front of Flora's nose and said, 'There now, Flora,' said he, 'there is the very big frog that was inside you.'

"But Flora looked steadily at him for a moment, and replied in an even voice.

"'That, sure enough,' said she, 'is the very frog; but you would not believe me for weeks and wouldn't do anything. Now, you left the frog so long inside me that it left a swarm of tadpoles. It is not one frog but many that are now inside me.'"

"Oh yes, I remember about Flora wife of Calum. She died of the frogs all right. Not even the wisest and cleverest of doctors can cure every case. If they did there would be no death and the Island would by now be full of Methusalehs."

That was a new thought for Murdo, and he laughed, thinking of an island crowded out by Methusalehs on crutches.

## AN DOTAIR BAN

"This Island," concluded Alasdair, rising to go, "never saw a doctor so wise, so clever, so humane as an Dotair Ban, or one who lived so humbly towards God and so justly and so mercifully towards his fellows."

"No wonder," said Murdo, following Alasdair to the door, "no wonder his grandson gave me a sovereign."

## THE LADY ON THE TOP OF BEN LEE

## § I

OF ALL THE STRANGE AND UNEXPECTED EVENTS which have happened to me, probably the strangest was that which I am now to narrate. After the romance and mystery of the otter's cave had ended in a sad disillusionment, as I have already narrated, caves lost all their charm. But hill-tops were still there, and in the school holidays scarcely a day passed without my climbing to the top of a hill. To this day, whenever I find myself in a strange place my first impulse is to get to the top of the nearest hill. The reason why you never find atheists and agnostics and Freudians among the dwellers in the world's high lands is that the folk who live under the shadow of mountains naturally lift up their eyes.

It does not need a high hill to realise the joy of ascending. As you rise, how amazingly does the world grow large. The horizon recedes, and as it recedes islands hitherto invisible rise out of the sea; new bays and lochs leap into view. Down below at the base of Ben Lee the island of Raasay, crowned by Dun Can, shuts in the view to the east; Ben Dianaveg screens the north, and Glamaig the south; while Ben Lee itself with its outposts blots out the south-west and west. It was a very contracted world indeed viewed from the sea-level. But no sooner do you begin to climb than the hills of Torridon spring out of the sea and the coast-line of Ross reveals itself in promontories and bays; away to the north the coast-line of Skye shows itself in the perfection of line and curve; the Old Man of Storr keeps his eternal vigil; and away in the west little islands are seen floating in silver sheen; Mac-Leod's Tables, thirty miles away, are robed in dazzling sheen; and far far away across the Minch the hazy outline of hills proclaims a new world. But there is another process also; for the enlarging world is also a contracting world. As you look down, the higher you rise, the smaller do the habitations of men become. The houses in the townships down below almost disappear, so small do they become. In the enlarging world the scheming of men, their toils and their quarrels, are

dwarfed into insignificance. That is why the soul finds its healing among the mountains. The hills do not debate as to which of them is nearer the Presence; they do not quarrel about definitions, nor excommunicate one another; Sguir na Ghillean, though it far overtops Glamaig, does not proclaim to the world that Glamaig has no share in the bounty of God. I never fail to enumerate among my causes for thankfulness that I was reared among hills and in the hearing of waves crowding on the shore. When I read the insolence that claims a monopoly in the grace of God, I only need to remember the hills and instantly indignation gives place to quiet humour. On the whole, the man who says there is no God is greatly to be preferred to the man who says there is no God but for one. For such colossal egotism is an insulator that prevents all traffic inward. And there is nothing that can come outward.

## § 2

THAT is a long exordium leading to the top of Ben Lee in the middle of August. I was in my twelfth year, and I had a great yearning for books to read. My father's collection of books was poor provender for an imaginative little boy. Much of it was in Gaelic—such as Bunyan's *Holy War* and the *Pilgrim's Progress*. It is strange how forbidding the very names in these allegories are when translated into Gaelic. These books repelled me—probably because I had little facility in Gaelic reading. Years afterwards I read the *Pilgrim's Progress* in its own language and was enthralled. But Matthew Henry's *Commentaries*, and Puritan sermons, were no pasture for a boy. Fiction was entirely forbidden, as it was utterly unprofitable to read a lot of lies! If only, I thought, as I climbed the easy slopes of Ben Lee on that August day, if only I had a good story-book to read I would be completely happy. And there, in the most unlikely place in the world to look for books, on the top of Ben Lee, I found them!

On the top of the hill there is a cairn of rough stones, just high enough to shelter from the wind that always blows at that height. As a north breeze was blowing, I purposed sitting on the south side of the cairn, but when I got round it, there I found a woman with the wind in her hair and her tam-o'-shanter in her lap, gazing at the ramparts of the Coolins. No wonder she gazed with her eyes alit, for, search the world over, you could not find a more entrancing scene. If I was astonished, the stranger was equally astonished. She wasn't startled, for the apparition of a red-haired, freckled boy of twelve does not startle even on a hill-top. I was speechless with astonishment, but not so the lady. The conversation that followed was as follows:

LADY. Hullo! Where did you come from?

BOY. The Braes.

LADY. Which part of the Braes?

BOY. Ollach.

LADY. What's your name?

BOY. Norman.

LADY. What else? What's your surname?

BOY. Maclean.

LADY. You ought to be a MacLeod with the Christian name Norman.

BOY. My grandmother was MacLeod.

LADY. That explains it. This is the Island of Macdonalds, MacLeods and Mackinnons. How came you to be here and not in Mull?

BOY. My father came from Coigach in Lochbroom.

LADY. That is a strange place for a Maclean to come from.

BOY. His great-grandfather escaped from Culloden and fled to the West with a companion. He settled in Coigach, and there are many Macleans there now. So my father says.

LADY. Why did your father come to Skye?

BOY. He is a schoolmaster.

LADY. Do sit down and let us have a comfortable talk.

I did not however sit down, but I lay on a clump of heather and, cupping my chin in my hands, looked up at the stranger and thought to myself that never had I seen so beautiful a woman.

LADY. Do you speak Gaelic as well as English?

BOY. Yes.

LADY. Did you find it difficult to learn?

BOY. No, I was born speaking both languages.

LADY. That was clever of you. I wish I had been clever like that.

BOY. You can easily learn.

LADY. I find it very difficult. My teacher says that nobody who cannot say correctly the Gaelic for "I saw a bald, shaggy calf in the field of the rushes" can ever learn Gaelic. Can you say that?

BOY. Chunnaic mi laodh maol luaidagach ann an achà luacharach.

LADY. That's it! But I can never get my tongue round the ch's. I am all right so far as "Chunnaic mi laodh maol," but after that I am no good.

BOY. Gaelic is not of great use anyway.

LADY. My great-grandfather spoke it. We can see his native island from here—Raasay. That is why I would like to learn it.

BOY. You will be a MacLeod then: my grandmother's family came from Raasay.

LADY. Now isn't that thrilling! Why, boy, you and I are cousins,

and we have found each other on the top of a hill in Skye. Cousins, but no doubt far remote; but still, the Chief and the clan are of the same blood.

BOY. Your great-grandfather would be the Chief of Raasay?

LADY. He was, and his granddaughter was my mother. Now, boy, what Church do you belong to?

BOY. The Established Church.

LADY. Now, that is a pity. We were getting so friendly, you and I, and now we are parted again. For I don't like the Established Church.

BOY. You will like the Free Church, then?

LADY. Not at all: worse and worse. I'll try and explain why I loathe them both. I had a grand-uncle, the best man who ever walked, and he became a minister of the Church of Scotland. And the Assembly of the Church deposed him from the ministry and handed him over to Satan, and forbade his preaching in any of their churches, because he taught that God loved all men.

BOY. My father told me that God does not love all men, only the elect, and the rest are roasted in hell to all eternity.

LADY. Don't you believe it, my boy. God is your father, and no father would roast his children for all eternity. You look, Norman, round about. What a lovely world, and God made it lovely for His children to be happy in. Do you think, my boy, that God would make a palace such as this for the happiness of His children and then throw them into a pit of fire and brimstone? It is impossible that having done the one He could do the other.

BOY. I am so glad. Many a night I could not sleep for thinking of it.

LADY. My poor grand-uncle! Just when these hard-hearted men were on the point of deposing him his father got up and said, "Moderator, I am not afraid for my son; though his brethren cast him out, the Master whom he serves will not forsake him, and while I live I will never be ashamed to be the father of so holy and so blameless a son."

BOY. You said you disliked the Free Church worse. Why is that?

LADY. That happened before there was a Free Church; but it was the men who led the Free Church afterwards who insisted on deposing my saintly grand-uncle. Are you fond of reading?

BOY. Yes, but I have no books.

LADY. Now this Island is full of history. There's Raasay: Prince Charlie was there, and Dr. Johnson and Boswell; and there's Sconser, just below us. Macdonald of Sleat, MacLeod of Dunvegan, and MacLeod of Raasay met there in the inn (now the lodge) and decided the fate of Three Kingdoms.

BOY. How could they?

LADY. They debated whether they would join Prince Charlie with their clans and decided not. They could have put five thousand men in the field. That was why Prince Charlie lost.

Suddenly the boy felt, instead of being all his days, so far, in a back-water, remote from the world, that he was in the centre of the world. The fate of Three Kingdoms decided at Sconser under the shadow of Glámaig. The lives of millions turned upon that. The hills seemed to dance round him as he gazed at the stranger, and lay enchanted with chin cupped in his palms.

LADY. I must go. Write on this your name and address and I will send you two books. The one is the best story ever written for boys, and the other will give you the story of the Island.

So the lady produced a little book (diary) and a pencil, and the boy wrote his name and address.

The lady rose, and going to the side of the cairn bowed to Dun Can and so said farewell to Raasay.

"I come here every year at this time," she said. "Goodbye, my new-found kinsman."

And she went down towards Sligachan Hotel, walking lightly like a deer.

I did not ask her name, and I never saw her again. But a week later Donald the postman brought from Portree a parcel addressed to Master Norman Maclean. It was the first I ever received. My hands could scarcely undo the strings for trembling with excitement. And when the brown paper was removed there were disclosed two books: Boswell's *Tour of the Hebrides*, and *Robinson Crusoe*.

"She did not forget," I thought, as I carried them off.

### § 3

THAT summer Sam was shepherding the township's lambs and I told him of the books and how I got them. Sam suggested that we should read the story-book together, beginning on the morrow, which was Sunday. He would shepherd the lambs to the side of the burn that ran precipitately beside our house. Half a mile from the sea, the burn flowed through a little dell which was protected from the prevailing winds by a steep bank. It was a perfect place to read in. One bank formed a rest for the back. Hazel bushes provided shade, and the burn sang its low, murmuring song ceaselessly. There Sam and I met and found ourselves transported to the realm of romance as the tale of shipwreck and loneliness and ingenuity unfolded itself. When

we came to the footprint in the sand and Man Friday, Sam could no longer contain himself.

"That is the greatest story I ever heard," exclaimed Sam. "It beats the best story that Alasdair MacChallum ever told. I'll tell you what. I am going to be a sailor and arrange to get shipwrecked, and cast on an island like that. You will see that I'll act just as well as Crusoe."

We both forgot the flight of time. Sam looked and no lambs were in sight. "Mo creachd" (my misfortune), cried Sam. "The lambs are gone," and he was over the stream with two bounds and running towards the top of a near hillock whence he could see his strayed flock.

And I set out, down-stream, homewards. Then I remembered it was Sunday and that I might get into trouble for being away so long and missing the long-drawn-out reading and prayers wherewith Sunday ended. And my fears were soon justified.

"Where have you been?" asked the menacing voice of my father at the door. "Have you forgotten that it is the Sabbath?"

"I was up the burn," I answered. "I was reading and forgot the time."

"I hope it was the Bible you were reading," he threatened. "If it wasn't, you will answer for it. Oh! I see the book you were reading. Hand it over."

I handed it to him. And as he glanced at it his face darkened and the cloud overcast him. That cloud was the terror of the family. All of a sudden, from an affectionate and playful man he was transformed into a fierce and remorseless tyrant who deemed it his duty to appease his God by punishing with the utmost severity the supposed transgression of His laws.

"I see what you were reading," he said; "lying tales of adventures that never happened, and of men that never existed. That is how you spend the Holy Sabbath. Instead of the Bible, the Book that tells no lies, you read a book all lies. And you absent yourself from the worship of God. No wonder. After breaking the Sabbath you would be uncomfortable at worship. Tomorrow morning I will give you the biggest thrashing of your life. I will not break the Sabbath by thrashing you tonight."

"Give me my book," I begged.

"No," said he, putting it in his pocket. "I'll keep the book and tomorrow I'll thrash you."

At that my mother appeared in the door. She could not help hearing the loud threatening voice, and out she came.

"No," she said, and she spoke in a voice with the edge of steel, "no, you shall not thrash him in the morning."



"I will," he replied, "it's my duty. The law of God must be honoured. I will not be one of those who spare the rod and ruin the child."

"The law of God says, 'Thou shalt not do any work,'" she answered. "It does not say, 'Thou shalt not read.' The boy was not working, he was only reading, and you shall not thrash him."

At that he was taken aback. My mother speaking as an expositor of Holy Scripture and as an exponent of the higher criticism was startling. He went over the Fourth Commandment quickly in his mind, and sure enough there wasn't a word forbidding reading.

"There were no novels in those days," he said. "If there were, He would have forbidden reading them on the Sabbath. Yes. I will thrash him in the morning."

"No," she said, her voice still hardening, "no, you shall not. The boy is now in his twelfth year, and I was weak in that I allowed you to go on thrashing him too long. Thrashing him for bringing in fresh water from the well on the Sabbath; thrashing him for walking out on the hill on the Sabbath . . ."

"For breaking God's laws I thrashed him," he shouted.

"God's laws!" she replied. "You are a better man in your own estimation than the Son of God himself. He walked through the cornfields on the Sabbath, and told His disciples that the Sabbath was made for man's benefit not for his enslavement."

"Yes, He did walk in the cornfields," replied my father; "but that was His one weakness. But I'll thrash the boy all the same, and put the fear of God in him."

"No, you shall not," she replied. "You can thrash John or George. They belong to your side of the family. They are the black-haired, swarthy-skinned Macleans. But anybody can see that Norman belongs to my side of the family. He is red-haired, fair-skinned, as different from the others as day and night. He is not a Maclean but a MacLeod. You can thrash the Macleans of the family, but not the MacLeods. You can be certain of that."

My father turned on his heel and went into the house. He lit the lamp and opened the Bible and read the Book of Proverbs and St. Paul's Epistles till midnight. My mother and I lingered outside for a little.

"Norman, my dear," said she with her arm round my shoulder, "you must always remember that your father is a good man, the best of men, but he has had great disadvantages in his life which explain his lack of gentleness and charity at times."

"What were his disadvantages?" I asked.

"Well, Norman, my love," she replied musingly, "your father is a foreigner in this Island. That is a sore disadvantage to him. He was brought up in the North country and his people were exiles from Mull, that was a great disadvantage. It is a sore trial to be an incomer in a land where the people are of nobler blood and of higher ways of thinking and living. It makes him bitter to feel his inequality. That is how he is at times harsh. It makes him feel a little superiority when he thrashes you. But you must never forget that he is the best of men; and that the Clan Maclean are themselves a great and noble clan though not among the first."

"Who are the first, Mother?" I asked.

"Alas," she replied, "that a child of mine should ask such a question. The Macdonalds are first, the MacLeods second, and among the rest, who do not amount to much, you can put the Macleans first."

That was the end of that ever memorable Sabbath.

My father had the bad habit of appearing at our bedside on Monday morning before we awoke and thrashing us soundly with his tawse for the alleged Sabbath-breaking of the day before. At this time John was away at school, and George too young, so I was the whipping-boy of the family. On that Monday morning I forestalled any whipping that might be persisted in. I got up with the lark, slipped into my parents' room and found *Robinson Crusoe* on the mantelpiece. I loosed the cow and herded her as she grazed on the dewy grass, wondering no doubt why she was set free so early that morning. At breakfast my father's face was still clouded but he said never a word.

He never thrashed me again.

It is strange to think of the steps by which we arrive at the various stages of life's emancipations. Here are the steps by which I was delivered from the terrors of hell and from the tyranny of taboos which made one day a prison. There was first the disillusionment of the cave, which led to the haunting of the hills; there was second the strange lady on the hill-top; there was third the gift of *Robinson Crusoe*; there was fourth the excitement of Sam over Man Friday which kept me late that Sunday evening—all that brought on the deliverance. What strange instruments are used for the saving of souls—strangers on hill-tops and *Robinson Crusoe*!

In the year 1930, in a hospice on a hill-top in Judea, I met a charming Jewish doctor who had fled from Hitler's persecutions. He had a wireless in his room, and I asked him on Saturday evening what the news had been. "This is the Sabbath," he answered, "and I don't listen to the news." "What do you do?" I asked, amazed. "I read my Bible," he replied. "Well," I remonstrated, "what does the Bible

tell you but the reactions of prophets to the news of their day? Sennacherib was their Hitler. And they would listen to news of Sennacherib on the Sabbath, and find in them the record of the judgment of God. The Bible is just the news a couple of thousand years old."

"That is so," he said, "but still I don't listen to the news on the Sabbath."

"Why don't you, if you agree with me?"

"Because the commandment is, 'Thou shalt not do any work,' and I cannot listen to the news because that would mean work first: *I would have to switch on the wireless*. The only way I could do it without sin would be to leave the wireless on from Friday sunset to Saturday sunset. I could then listen without breaking the Sabbath."

And suddenly I was switched off from that hill-top in Judea to the Isle of Skye, and from the year 1940 to the year 1881, and I saw my father standing at the door saying, "I will thrash you on the morrow for breaking the Sabbath." It is amazing the idols wherewith men displace the love of God and the love of man. And among these idols is the Sabbath of the Pharisees.

## § 4

IT was not known, then, in our Island that the greatest of all Sabbatarians were the Essenes. While the Pharisees only debated whether it was lawful to eat an egg that was laid on the Sabbath, the Essenes went further on the road to perfection, for they would not carry a coin on the holy day. If we had known that, there might have been difficulties about the collections in the Island!

One of the amazements of history is how Pharisees and Sabbatarians, whom Jesus condemned as the enemies of true religion, were adopted as the exemplars of Christianity. The religious passions which crucified Him were consecrated in His name. This doubtless was what H. G. Wells meant by the words: "The Galilean was too big for our small hearts." ... There is this to be said for it: It was a great discipline.

## THE WORLD BREAKS IN

## § I

ONE SPRING DAY, shortly before the Battle of the Braes which I shall soon record, there walked into the school a man in a kilt. I remember him vividly because he was the first man I ever saw wearing the kilt. After a brief talk with my father, he asked if he might speak to the scholars. "Gaelic or English?" asked the man in the kilt. "English," said my father, "for it is not allowed to speak a word of Gaelic in school hours." We were helots in very truth: in our schools our own language was forbidden by "My Lords" in London. Then the man in the kilt began to speak about an old minister who at the yearly examination of the school in his parish always ended his address in the same way:

"There was a boy once who never missed a day in school, rain or snow or shine—that boy never missed a day in ten years. That boy, when he grew up, enlisted in the Portuguese army; in a short time he was made a Captain in the Portuguese army; and at last he was made a Major-General in the Portuguese army. Boys and girls, you follow the example of that boy; never miss a day in school, rain or snow or shine, and you will all become Major-Generals in the Portuguese army."

At that Sam kicked me and laughed. But a look from the Master froze his laughter on his lips.

Then the man in the kilt gave us good advice, which, alas! I have now quite forgotten. The burden of it was that with the key of the learning now available to the poorest we could open the doors to place and fortune throughout the world. He radiated good-will.

That evening I asked my father who he was.

"John Murdoch," was the answer, "the editor of a newspaper in Inverness."

"What is the newspaper's name?"

"*The Highlander*."

The result of John Murdoch's visit to Braes was that for a year or so *The Highlander* was delivered by Donald the post to about a dozen

houses. Donald was a remarkable man, and the only postman in Britain who could neither read nor write. He did learn laboriously to write his own name, but what the letters composing it were was quite beyond him. He got a clerk in Portree to give him the bundle of letters in the order of delivery and to read the names over to him, and he delivered them without ever making a mistake. He had a great contempt for restless people who went from place to place. He had never seen a railway train. "The steamer," said Donald once, "leaves Portree for Stromeferry at nine in the morning and returns again at six in the evening. What is the good of it?" Three times a week he brought the letters from Portree, and received the magnificent weekly wage of seven shillings and sixpence. But he never complained of his wage: "For," said he, "I often arrive without a single letter!" John Murdoch's visit brought Donald a great change, for once a week he had at least a dozen newspapers to deliver!

That newspaper was to me a source of great interest, for it was the first that kindled my imagination. It is not realised by the grown-up folk what a boy of twelve can understand. I do not claim that I understood all the fiery philippics of John Murdoch. But I can now see myself in a corner reading *The Highlander* and realising for the first time the grievous wrongs which were being inflicted on my fellow-countrymen. Much of the rhetoric was beyond me, but I did realise that the wrongs of the Highlanders were crying loudly to heaven.

The nation boasted its freedom, but Murdoch with biting sarcasm explained to the Highlanders the freedom which they enjoyed. It was a freedom to be destitute and hungry, to be evicted from house and home at the whim of an alien landlord or of a Chief who had sacrificed his duty to his greed; it was the freedom to be driven across the seas to toil like serfs in the unclaimed wilderness; if that was freedom, they were free indeed.

Many years later, I learned from perusing an old diary that at that time *The Highlander* was in financial difficulties. Murdoch's tour in Skye was an effort to get more capital. The richest man in Skye, Lachlan Macdonald, the laird of Skeabost, had made a great fortune in India. "I gave John Murdoch £5," he recorded. When I read that, I realised why John Murdoch walked the roads of the Island.

The source of Murdoch's compassion for the poor and the dispossessed was his piety. He was a devout man. Hearing in Uist of a poor woman dying in destitution, he walked three miles to see her. He prayed with her in Gaelic and left money on the table when he departed.

"Co fear bha sud?" (Who was that man?) asked the dying woman of a neighbour.

"Bha Murachadh an Eilidh" (Murdoch of the Kilt) was the answer. "Murachadh an Eilidh," murmured the dying woman. "Cha dean an urnaigh feum sam bith" (The prayer will not do a jot of good).

An ungrateful comment, you may think. Not so, for in the common mind the kilt in those days was associated with Highland games and dances. That a prayer by a man garbed in a kilt should be heard in high heaven was beyond all belief.

John Murdoch was doomed, like all men ahead of their generation, to live a lonely life. As a reformer he was outcast from the rich, and wearing the kilt he was outcast from the unco guid. Even to this day his services to the Highlanders have not received due recognition. He died in Ayrshire many years later, having lived long enough to have seen the cause he toiled for triumph. That was the only reward he would have sought or prized. A few persons are so vital and dynamic that once seen they are never forgotten. I only saw John Murdoch once, but I never forgot him.

§ 2

WHAT made an indelible impression on my boyish mind was the record in *The Highlander* week by week of the Highland evictions and the extracts from Donald MacLeod's *Gloomy Memories*, which told with great detail the terrible story of the Evictions in the county of Sutherland when Strathnaver from being a land of comfort and happiness was turned into a wilderness in one day. I wept over that record.

It was in the year 1814 that Young and Sellar, the factors of the Countess of Sutherland, resolved to clear Strathnaver by evicting the small tenants and so turn the glen into a sheep-run. Patrick Sellar, the local factor, himself took a lease of the land, and notices were served on the people that they must clear out at the May term. In those days they spoke no language but Gaelic. There was nobody to buy their furniture or their stock. For when a whole community is thus driven out, there are no buyers. The distances and the lack of communication made movement difficult. Sellar would brook no delay. Donald MacLeod was himself a witness of what followed. After these many years I have looked up the record. It was easy to do so, for Alexander MacKenzie began his book *The Highland Clearances* by reprinting the *Gloomy Memories*. The following extracts will make you realise why as a boy I wept over the story:

Strong parties . . . furnished with faggots and other combustibles rushed on the dwellings of these devoted people and immediately

commenced setting fire to them, proceeding in their work with the greatest rapidity till about 300 houses were in flames. . . . Many deaths ensued from alarm, from fatigue and cold, the people being instantly deprived of shelter, and left to the mercy of the elements.

A number of the sick, who could not be carried away instantly, were collected by their friends and placed in an uncomfortable hut. The cries of the victims were heart-rending, exclaiming in their anguish, "Are you going to leave us to perish in the flames?" A dense cloud of smoke enveloped the whole country by day and even extended far on the sea; at night an awfully grand but terrific scene presented itself—all the houses in an extensive district in flames at once. . . . I got my hands burnt taking out the poor woman amidst the flames of her once comfortable dwelling, uttering piercing moans: "Oh Dhia, Dhia, teine, teine" (Oh God, fire, fire).

## § 3

How came it that deeds such as these were done in a Christian country in the year 1814? We are not reading the account of the Vandals and the Goths burning the abodes of a conquered country or murdering its people. It is the record of how a Christian made almost a whole county a wilderness, and reduced her own people to destitution and misery. If pagans had done it to a conquered race we could understand it. And yet, when we know the whole story, we cannot but feel a deep compassion for the Duchess of Sutherland who made Strathnaver a waste. For the way by which that destruction came was this:

William, the seventeenth Earl of Sutherland, in his own person united "all the dignity and amenity of manners and character which give lustre to greatness."<sup>1</sup> He married a sister of Lady Glenorchy of pious memory. On the death of a daughter of singular beauty, the parents, to escape the gloom of a winter in Dunrobin and to distract their minds, went to the more cheerful atmosphere of Bath. There the Earl was seized by a malignant fever, and there Lady Sutherland nursed him for three weeks and, overcome with the burden of her sorrow and anxiety, died. Seventeen days later the Earl died. The House of Sutherland was left with a girl child, a year old, as sole heir. Out of that tragedy sprang the tragedy of Strathnaver.

In those days of slow communication, Lady Sutherland's mother in Edinburgh only heard of her daughter's condition after many days. She set out for Bath, and the story, as told by Hugh Miller, tells how, hastening as fast as horses could travel, she arrived one day at an inn,

<sup>1</sup> *Memoirs of Lady Glenorchy*, by Rev. Dr. Jones.

and saw two hearses standing by the wayside. She enquired whose bodies they contained. The reply was, "The remains of Lord and Lady Sutherland on their way to the Royal Chapel of Holyrood House." Such was the first intimation the lady received of the death of her daughter and son-in-law.

The child-heiress of Sutherland was brought up by the grandmother, far removed from her clan, and from the living power of that faith which for four generations the Earls of Sutherland had adorned. At an early age she married Lord Stafford. Thus her whole life was far removed from the loving loyalties of her own people. Her vast estates were managed by her husband and his agent, James Loch. No doubt the deeds of ruthless destruction that turned the fair glens of Sutherland into sheep-runs, and happy homes into blackened roofless walls, were done in her name. But it was to Lord Stafford, the English husband, that Sheriff MacKidd wrote his indictment; it was Patrick Sellar, the sub-factor, having got his orders from Lord Stafford's agent, who led the incendiaries and drove her clan to the shelterless and inhospitable shores. No doubt these deeds were represented to her as a necessary step in the evolution of crofters into fishermen! The writings of Mr. Loch, Lord Stafford's agent, reveal a contempt for the Gaelic-speaking Highlanders which could not have been exceeded if they had been inhabitants of the Congo. And yet, the infamy will stain her name while the memory of cruelty and wrong stirs indignation in the heart.

## § 4

AMID all the literature of human woe I know no record more poignant than that given by the Rev. Donald Sage, who was minister at Achness when he and his entire congregation were driven from their homes. Summonses of ejectment, in the name of the Duchess, were served on a population of 1600. The last Sunday before the congregation would be driven into exile came, and the people crowded their church for the last time. This is Donald Sage's description of the scene, unequalled for its poignancy in the annals of the Church:

I selected a text which had a pointed reference to the peculiarity of our circumstances, but my difficulty was how to restrain my feelings. . . . The service began. The very aspect of the congregation was of itself a sermon, and a most impressive one. I preached and the people listened, but every sentence uttered and heard was in opposition to the tide of our natural feelings, which, setting in against us, mounted at every step of our progress higher and higher.



At last all restraints were compelled to give way. The preacher ceased to speak, the people to listen. All lifted up their voices and wept, mingling their tears together. It was indeed the place of parting and the hour. The greater number parted never again to behold each other in the land of the living.

In her palace in London,<sup>1</sup> how was the Duchess of Sutherland, whose people these were, to know of these bitter waters of Marah, of these broken hearts? If any rumour reached her after many days, her husband, now the Duke of Sutherland, and his agent, James Loch, M.P., were there to explain their beneficent and philanthropic purpose. The Church was silent. Parliament was silent. The maxim of her day was that a man could do what he liked with his own. She did not know that her tenants too had their rights, that they were the clan who gained for their Chief the county of Sutherland. Nobody ever told her that it was only after 1745, when the Chiefs were transformed into landlords, that all their rights as landlords were carefully conserved but that the people were deprived of their rights. Nobody gave a thought to the rights of the clan. Up to that time no Chief could evict his clan, any more than a King could evict his subjects wholesale. It was this unjust anglicising of the Chiefs that made that river of tears to flow; that caused that storm of sobs in the church at Achness. But the Duchess of Sutherland had nobody who could explain to her that a Chief was only the head of a great family—his clan; and that he had duties as well as rights. I cannot but be sorry for Elizabeth, Duchess of Sutherland. She did not deserve the infamy which cannot be detached from her name. The victim of evil counsellors, she found her tenants men and made them paupers.

Of these, the most active was Patrick Sellar the factor and sheep-tacksman. He commanded the incendiaries who reduced Strathnaver to dust and ashes. And it need not surprise us that when on the following year he was tried for murder and incendiarism in Inverness he was acquitted. For these were the pre-reform days when justice was administered by the land-owning class, when the Lord Braxfields of the day sent a political reformer remorselessly to Botany Bay. In that atmosphere Patrick Sellar could not but escape his condign punishment.

Let anyone ponder the address presented by the Presbytery of Tongue to the Duchess of Sutherland at a later date:

May it please your Grace, We, the Presbytery of Tongue, beg leave to approach your Grace with feelings of profound respect,

<sup>1</sup> "I have come from my house to your palace," said Queen Victoria to the Duchess of Sutherland.

and to express our joy at your safe arrival within our bounds. That Almighty God may bless your Grace—that He may long spare you to be a blessing to your people—and that He may finally give you the inheritance which is incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away, is the prayer of, May it please your Grace, the Members of the Presbytery of Tongue, Hugh MacKenzie, Moderator:

and he will realise that the very atmosphere made it impossible for the Duchess of Sutherland to perceive the enormity of her acts. Surely the object of such adulation could have done no wrong?

The House of Sutherland, in the years of famine, declined the funds raised for feeding the starving Highlanders. The Ducal House would be itself responsible for its county. It transpired afterwards that the factors exacted from the miserable tenants full payment for the meal they received. Nor did the members of the Presbytery of Tongue, after 1843, receive any more merciful treatment than the crofters of Strathnaver and Kildonan. In the biography of Dr. Guthrie we are told what happened to the Rev. Hugh MacKenzie who, as Moderator of the Presbytery, signed the fulsome address to the Duchess. Dr. Guthrie visited Tongue in 1845, and he found "Mr. Ustein, the loveliest and noblest of men," and his son, the Rev. William MacKenzie, who was ordained as Assistant and Successor to his father three months before the Disruption, living in a "but and ben" in which they found shelter after leaving the Manse, which Dr. Guthrie designated the finest he had seen "save Arbirlot." The following is part of Dr. Guthrie's description of the condition in which he found father and son:

His family [the old minister's] lives about forty miles away. . . . After passing the beautiful manse which he had left, I found the old man's shelter. . . . Before the filthy doorway there stood a broken cart and a black peat-stack. . . . I stepped into a mean apartment which is dining-room, library, bedroom and all; and there, beyond the bed, sat the old man, half-dressed, deep buried in the sleep of exhausted nature. I stepped up to him but he stirred not. . . . Then, stealing across the room, I pushed open the closed door, and found his son stretched on his sick-bed all the worse for hearing through the long night, while unable to relieve them, his father's sufferings. . . .

Four days after Dr. Guthrie wrote that moving description the venerable old minister, of whom a friend wrote: "I never knew any minister so loved and admired by his people," passed to his rest (30th

June 1845); and four weeks later his son and colleague, William MacKenzie, died also. For three generations the MacKenzies had occupied the Manse of Tongue as parish ministers, and that was the grim end. There is nothing in the world more demoralising than absolute power. The owner of a whole county was more powerful than a King in those days, for no King would dare exile his people wholesale. When that power was exercised through the James Lochs and the Patrick Sellars of this world, it created a wilderness and called it prosperity. Mr. Ustein and his son William were dying in that sordid cottage because building sites were denied. The Ducal House of Sutherland is to be greatly pitied. They, the MacKenzies, grandfather, father, and son, had served as parish ministers of Tongue wellnigh a hundred years. The saintly patriarch who with his son lay there dying in that sordid shelter had read, as I have recorded, a laudatory address to the Duchess, under the wrong impression that the meal provided for famishing people was her gift. I wonder whether in the watches of sleepless nights, as he lay dying, the memory of that scene stabbed him. If so, it would be an added bitterness to the cup in his Gethsemane. For he would realise that to be silent when others are oppressed is to invite the same oppression on oneself. For tyranny is unappeasable. The ancient Earldom of Sutherland is to be pitied. It was a fountain of justice and mercy until it was transformed into an English Dukedom.

## § 5

LET the reader further consider the ruthless eviction of the native population from Glenorchy by the Marquis of Breadalbane by which the population of the parish was reduced in ten years from 1806 in 1831 to 831 in 1841. This nobleman had, in the words of Alexander MacKenzie, "a mania for eviction," yet the public opinion of Scotland was such that he was actually canonised in the *Disruption Worthies*. William the Conqueror destroyed thirty-six villages to make the New Forest; but this Highland Chief made desolate the homes of a thousand of his own people that he might create the forest of Black Mount, sixty miles in circumference. The tyranny of the Conqueror pales before that of the Chief; for he only despoiled the conquered, while the Chief despoiled those of his own flesh and blood. And 800 years of Christian development separated the one from the other. And that oppressor of the helpless and the poor finds a place in the Scots hagiology! That of itself lights up the atmosphere in which doctrinal "principles" had replaced the duties of brotherhood and the law of love. It would be

difficult to find a parallel to these large pages of sustained eulogy. The Marquis who made Glenorchy a desert "embraced Liberal opinions when the very name was odious . . . cast in his lot with the Free Presbyterian Church. . . . His character stood so high that his influence among the laity was what that of Chalmers had been among the clergy. . . . His pecuniary support was munificent. . . . His deepest sympathies were with his people. A Highlander himself, his heart was in the Highlands and devoted to everything which concerned the honour and prosperity of that romantic country." This was the man who drove one thousand of his people into homeless exile. It is difficult for us to think what manner of men they were who could thus eulogise him. What we must always remember is that everyone must be judged by the standards of his own day. In those days, driving a clan from their homes and their livelihood did not debar a man from being ranked with the godly. Elizabeth, Duchess of Sutherland was a generation before the noble Marquis. The stage of ethical development of her country was such that she had not a chance of saving her clan or her name. She was the product of her day.

It was in the lovely parish of Morven, on the Sound of Mull, that I realised, many years afterwards, the full horror wrought by evictions. There, one could travel for miles without seeing the smoke of a dwelling or meeting a person on the roads. My brother, John, was minister of the parish, and every year I paid him a visit. The Manse of Fiunary stands on the centre of a cleared area. Dr. John MacLeod,<sup>1</sup> "the high priest" of Morven, spent his last years in pathetic loneliness, having seen his parish almost emptied of its people.

Glen after glen had been turned into sheep-walks, and the cottages in which generations of gallant Highlanders had lived and died were unroofed, their torn walls and gables left standing like mourners beside the graves, and the little plots of garden or of cultivated enclosure allowed to merge in the moorland pasture. . . . "At one stroke of the pen," he said to me, "two hundred of the people were ordered off. There was not one of these whom I did not know, and their fathers before them; and finer men and women never left the Highlands."

Dr. John MacLeod took pity on an old dying man, and in a corner of the church ground shelter was provided for him. When the Great War broke out in 1914, his granddaughter was still living in the cottage built on that site. Her son was eager to enlist and fight for King and

<sup>1</sup> "Farewell to Fiunary," by the Very Rev. Donald MacLeod, D.D., in *Good Words*, August 1882.

Country, but the mother did her best to dissuade him. "Why should you go to fight for them?" she would say. "They have taken the land from us." At last the son, having read an account of German atrocities, could not be restrained and went off to Oban to enlist. A few months later he was killed, and my brother went to comfort her as best he could. He found her rocking herself before the fire, and in her woe all she could say was: "They have taken everything from us; they have left us nothing but the churchyard." And when my brother repeated her words, it seemed to me as if that poor widow, whose cottage bordered on the churchyard, had crystallised the fate of the Scottish Highlander into a phrase: truly, in the space of a hundred years they were left with nothing but the churchyard.

## § 6

IT may seem to the reader that I have wandered far from John Murdoch's visit to the school at Braes in that year of grace 1882: It may be so in space and in time, but certainly not in spirit. For John Murdoch's newspaper, which came thereafter, was full of these unhappy far-off things: full of the martyrdom of the Celtic race, over which I pored as a boy until my eyes were blinded with tears. When the people of Braes burned the summonses, as I shall narrate later, they were only doing what many of the victims had done before. The tenants of Coigach (whence my father came) organised resistance, and their wives made a bonfire of the factor's ejectment summonses. Fortunately the Countess of Cromartie heard in time and she stopped the evictions. For a hundred years that relentless persecution of the Highlanders had gone on. They found in the seats of the mighty no heart to pity and no arm to save. It is only when seen against that background that the Battle of the Braes can be understood. The wrongs inflicted on a law-abiding and loyal race at last boiled up and overflowed in defiance and in resistance. . . . Sitting here at my window, I can see the circle of hills on which my eyes so often rested as a boy, Glamaig and Ben Dianaveg, Sguir na Ghilleann, encircling Ben Lee. And there rises in me a great desire that the future generations should see these tender-hearted and generous people, among whom my early days were passed, as they really were—a kindly and gentle folk who in their hearts loved their Chief, were loyal to their Queen, and, above all, were devout worshippers of God. There was scarcely a dwelling along these six miles of shore-line in which the low music of psalms and prayer did not ascend to heaven morning and evening. They endured as beholding Him who is invisible. And if today, in old age,

my heart can still kindle with indignation against the oppressor and the persecutor, I can trace the feeling back to those days when John Murdoch depicted the wrongs of the poor in words that seared the heart, and Sam stood sentry on the hill above the Cumhag watching for the coming of the officers of the law. For in those days men guarded the rights of property as a sacred deposit, while they were utterly indifferent to the rights of man.

## THE DEFIANCE OF OPPRESSORS

## § I

IT WAS A VERY ROUGH-HEWN DESK at which Sam and I and one or two more sat on an early spring day, learning to memorise the Kings of England and their dates. It is curious to think of all the dates that I learned laboriously and painfully in my schooldays. I only today remember three—the Battle of Bannockburn, the '45, and the Battle of Waterloo—and now I find that even these are slipping from me. I have had the greatest sympathy with the schoolboy who, when told that the League of Nations would put an end to wars, exclaimed with fervour: "There will be no more dates to learn." And I can appreciate the feelings of the American lady who, visiting Scotland and hearing the '45 being discussed at dinner, asked in perplexity: "Who were the '45?" and received for answer: "Oh, the '45 were the sons of the '15." It is curious, if one begins to write about the '45, how difficult it seems to stop. In the autumn of 1943, on my way to Edinburgh, I found myself in the train sitting opposite a young Australian officer who was making a lightning tour of Scotland. In the neighbourhood of Culloden I tried to indicate to him the locality of the battle. To my amazement, I found that he had never heard of it, nor of Prince Charlie, nor of the change-over from the Stuarts to the Hanoverian dynasty! What strange ideas of education still govern our minds! Here was a bright-faced youth who had come all the way from the Antipodes to fight for the House of Windsor and who did not know how it came that he was not fighting for the House of Stuart! . . .

It was during the painful exercise of loading our memories with dates that Sam leaned over and whispered, "This is my last day at school this season."

"What has happened that you are leaving so soon?"

Sam assumed an air of great mystery. "Great events are going to happen," said he. "The mighty are to be cast down from their seats, and the poor are to be lifted up on high."

"What is the meaning of that?" I asked.

"It means war," Sam replied briefly, "and sentry duty."

At the play-hour he told me, in the strictest confidence (such as boys love to shroud their movements), that from the morrow sentries were to be on duty on the top of the little hill above the Cumhag (narrow pass) to watch the road from Portree. For word had come that the officers of the law were to proceed to Braes soon to deliver summonses to the people for non-payment of rents. I do not know how it came that magical attributes were assigned by the folk to these summonses. Probably it was because they were issued in the name of the Queen; they were the first arm of the law which, if it seized you, landed you in jail; and summonses at last loomed in the imagination of the crofters as if they were like the smallpox, which, if it once came to a township, spread from house to house, bringing death and woe. The only safety was to keep the sheriff-officer and his writs at a distance. So it was arranged that sharp-eyed boys would keep watch every day on the road from the top of Cnoc a Chumhag. No better sentry-post could be chosen, for nobody could come over "bealach Achnahanaid" without being seen from that hill.

Next day Sam and John MacLeod took up their duty as sentries. There is a seat on the hill-top so hollowed out that, looked at from the schoolhouse, only the heads appear of those occupying it. It was with the feelings of an outcast that I next day looked at the little hill-top and saw the heads of Sam and John watching "bealach Achnahanaid" for the coming of the officers of the law. There was I doomed to wrestle with the dates of murderous Kings, and of battles long ago, while Sam and John were on guard against the enemy. "The day," said Sam, "is not long enough for all John's stories of giants and fairy-tales."

## § 2

BEING thus a prisoner in the school, struggling with meaningless figures, I did not myself witness that first clash between the majesty of the law and the rebels against its authority which proved of more import than the dates of any King. However, I record it here—April 7, 1882. It was a lovely day such as often comes in the month of April, when the sea mirrored as glass the encompassing hills. Feeling thirsty and restless, I asked permission to go out. All my life I have had an inexplicable sense of things happening without my seeing them. That morning I was oppressed by that feeling. Sam and John were in the midst of a row. I wandered into the kitchen to get a drink. And as I opened the door I saw a sight that fixed me motionless.



Two men stood there in their shirt-sleeves, dishevelled and earth-stained. Clots of blood had congealed on the face of the older man. A basin of warm water was on the table between them. And my mother, with tears streaming down her cheeks, was carefully washing a cut on the cheek of him whom I guessed to be the sheriff-officer; his witness was only earth-stained. She was moaning softly as she dressed the wound: "Alas! alas! The disgrace of this day: that this should happen in the land of the Gospel: a man mobbed. Wounded in the path of his duty. Alas! alas!"

She paused a moment, lifted his jacket from the chair. "Oh, Angus," she wailed, "your jacket is covered with mud."

"That's not the worst of it," said he.

"Oh, Angus," she went on, "they have plastered your cheek."

"That's not the worst of it," said he.

"What worse did they do?" she asked.

"Well, it was this," he replied. "When they began to pelt me with turf and stones I asked one of them for a smoke. They stopped, watching me, thinking I was a cool hand. At that Mairi NicFiulaidh (Mary the daughter of Finlay) suddenly cried, 'Men, make him burn the summonses.' And at that they yelled, 'Put them down there on the road'; and I put them on the road. And with the stones in their hands ready to kill me if I disobeyed they compelled me to make a heap of the summonses, arranging them like peat about to be kindled. At that, a boy came running with a burning peat."

"Now," I said, "you can do as you like with them."

"But Mairi only cried, 'Make the traitor burn them himself; make him set fire to them himself.'"

"And an old man, Alasdair MacChallum, said to me, 'When you do a thing under compulsion it is not you that do it but those who compel you.'"

"At that a shower of stones came: and I bent down and blew on the smouldering peat and put it beside the summonses. And a breeze of wind suddenly came and made a crackling flame of my papers. Never was an officer of the law disgraced as I have been disgraced. If they had burned them I wouldn't feel it so keenly: but to come so far and have to burn them myself: that hurts me more than the stones and the clods."

"It is not you that are disgraced," comforted my mother, "it is we in the Braes. I never dreamed that we would ever become criminals and law-breakers. Your bruises, Angus, will heal in a few days. But the wound to our good name will never heal. The brave sons of Skye attacking defenceless men!"

"That's all right," replied Martin, putting on his soiled jacket. "They will soon find out who is defenceless and who is not defenceless. I don't mind much. Probably, in their place, I would do the same."

And my mother quickly infused a pot of tea and the two men were cheered and comforted.

Next day the newspapers of the country appeared with solemn leading articles whose burden was that law and order must be restored in the Highlands. One phrase ever recurring stuck in my memory: "conditions must be restored so that the Queen's Writ will run everywhere." I wondered what it was this so precious a thing, the Queen's Writ, could be. It had to run everywhere. Had it to run over Glamaig and the Coolins. It would be simpler if it could fly!

## § 3

THAT evening I was off to Gedintailor as soon as I was free. And Sam told me the whole story as he saw it. Early in the afternoon from their sentry-post John and he saw three men coming over the bealach a mile away. There was no mistaking their purpose. So, as instructed, they hoisted a flag on the hill-top and ran to warn the people that the law was coming at last. It was the spring ebb-tide and the people were busy in their boats cutting tangles and sea-ware. At once, hearing the whistles and seeing the flag, the boats hurried to the shore and the people ran up to the road. Some of the women had in their hands the reaping-hooks with which they cut the sea-ware. Now, a reaping-hook made of steel is a formidable weapon such as a Gurkha would love to swing. When Alasdair MacChallum saw the reaping-hooks in the hands of the women he stopped them and said:

"Throw down the reaping-hooks. You must not go into the crowd with weapons like these. A weapon that might kill a man is better left behind. For you never know what you may do if you get heated."

So they left their reaping-hooks on the top of the ridge and ran down to the road.

And there the three men stood, Angus Martin the sheriff-officer, Norman Beaton, Lord Macdonald's ground-officer, and Ewen Robertson, who accompanied them as the sheriff-officer's concurrent or assistant, surrounded by a crowd that every moment grew bigger as the men came running over the ridge from the shore.

"It was wonderful," said Sam, "the sense of power that possessed me. Here was I, and I had only to wave a flag and whistle and the men and women came in hundreds running as fast as hares. It's the

finest thing in the world to defy tyranny and oppressors and summon warriors to fight them. What were you doing in the school?"

"I was learning the dates of the Kings of England and the battles they fought."

"There you are," exclaimed Sam, "doing nonsense like that while I was defying the power of the law and the writs of Queen Victoria."

"It was the women who were the best warriors. They had no mercy on the minions of the law. Mairi the wife of Hamish Iain Og cursed the sheriff-officer in his board, in his bed, in his family, and Hamish himself stretched out his hand and said, 'Give me the summonses.' The sheriff-officer looked at him, and without a word produced a bundle of papers. I was told to bring a burning peat from the house of Eoghan 'ic Domhuill 'ic Ian 'ic Eoghan, and the grass did not grow under my feet as I ran to the house and ran back with the burning peat. It was nearly dead when I got back. But Hamish Iain Og handed it very politely to the sheriff-officer. 'Blow on it,' said he, and the sheriff-officer looked round on the crowd, and then he blew the peat into a flame, and applied the flame to the papers. Never was there heard in Braes sweeter music than the crackle of the flames that devoured the summonses."

"At that point the assistant turned and ran towards Portree. 'Boys,' I cried, 'let us after him. The other two are only doing their duty, but that man is here oppressing us for hire.' So a dozen of us ran after him, and as we could run faster we soon had a hail of stones all round him. When he fell the second time I said, 'Halt! He has had enough.'"

"That was cruel, Sam, don't you think?"

"Cruel!" exclaimed Sam in astonishment. "It is he who was cruel. He came here to get us evicted from our homes. Poor widows like my mother! A chuckie-stone on the back is nothing compared to the cruelty of putting a widow and children homeless on the moor."

And that ended Sam's version of the affray.

"Ah, Thormoid," said Sam as I was leaving him, "it's the women who were splendid. The men were like sparrows compared to them. They were like eagles."

#### § 4

THE following day, towards evening, Alasdair MacChallum, as his habit was when he was troubled in his mind, came to our house to talk things over. He was a relative of my mother, and of the factor, and of Angus Martin—in fact, everybody in the Island is related one to another. That evening I was so interested in the conversation that

after these many years I can remember much of what was said. Alasdair told what he saw and heard, and how he got the women to part with the reaping-hooks.

ALASDAIR. I am greatly troubled in my mind about it all. Seeing that we have lived our lives securely under the protection of the law, it does not become us to trample on the law when it suits us.

SCHOOLMASTER. Three thousand years ago a wise man said almost the same as you have now said. His fellow-citizens condemned him to death, and his friends arranged for his escape. But he refused to do despite to the law which had so far protected him. So he drank the poison as he was condemned to do: and people have never forgotten that wise man, Socrates by name.

ALASDAIR. Wise indeed! And the Holy Book says, "Shall I receive good at the hand of the Lord and shall I not receive evil." It is not seemly, after receiving so much good, to kick at the evil.

SCHOOLMASTER'S WIFE. You remember Padruig Ban. He was the most honest man in the Braes: Padruig Macdonald. One year, long ago, Nicolson, the merchant in Portree, came to collect his debts and Padruig happened to be in the hill and missed him. Next morning the merchant heard a knock at the door before he was up, and going down there was Padruig after walking seven miles. "Here's your money," said Padruig, "I could not sleep last night for thinking what you might think of me after not getting your money yesterday." The merchant told Padruig that there was no need for him to have put himself about, but Padruig cut him short: "I could not allow a Macdonald to owe money to incomers such as Nicolson when once the money is due."

ALASDAIR. That is just what's troubling me. Truth and honesty are the foundations of safety. And honesty is no more.

SCHOOLMASTER'S WIFE. Dh'imich a mogh's 'n onairachd (The good manners and the sense of honour are gone).

ALASDAIR. You would indeed think so if you saw and heard the mob yesterday. But when I thought of it in the night I was greatly comforted by remembering that the leaders were of the baser sort. You know how the true Islanders despised the MacBhannains and the MacQuehans; and how these unworthy septs took the royal name Macdonald to hide their crookedness; and you know how the Nicolsons came from Assynt, and are not true Islanders. And those who shouted the loudest and threw the clods yesterday were really MacBhannains, MacQuehans, and Nicolson's.

SCHOOLMASTER'S WIFE. The MacQuehans! Yes of course. It was

only the father of this generation who began to call himself Macdonald, thus sullyng a royal name. You know, Alasdair, that a hundred years ago the MacQuehans roasted a black cat alive in a cave on the east side and so brought Satan himself into the presence and got from him the promise of earthly goods for stopping roasting the cat.

ALASDAIR. The story is well known; but the Bradein Dubh (black thief) got the better of them. He said that a promise extorted by cruelty was not valid; and he and the black cat disappeared in blue smoke.

SCHOOLMASTER'S WIFE. Roasting the black cat did the MacQuehans no good in the end. For they are as poor and as mannerless and as untrustworthy as ever.

ALASDAIR. And the Nicolsons arrived in this Island refugees from Assynt, and Lord Macdonald gave them land and stock and gear. And he gets no gratitude from the Nicolsons. They are the ring-leaders in every trouble. And I have been thinking where would this Island be without the Macdonalds. Lord Macdonald brought learned physicians to the Island. He planted the churches; he brought the Gospel; he founded Portree and set up a jail there and a sheriff; he planted every tree in the Island except a handful at Dunvegan. That I should live to see the day when Lord Macdonald is set at nought.

SCHOOLMASTER. I thought, Alasdair, that you were one of the foremost of the agitators. Listening to you now, I would think that you were an ancient Cavalier ready to die for the old order.

ALASDAIR. You are right, Master; I am a man with war raging within him. One side of me is for Lord Macdonald and another side of me is for the poor people. The flesh warreth against the spirit and the spirit against the flesh: but which is flesh and which spirit I do not know. But this I do know. It wasn't Lord Macdonald but his factor that took Ben Lee from us in 1865. Lord Macdonald was a boy of twelve then, and the factor was lord and master. It is factors that are the curse of the Island. And Lord Macdonald—God bless him—would not harm one of his own people for anything under the sun. And as for the MacBhannains, MacQuehans, and the Nicolsons, they shall all go to their own place at the last.

SCHOOLMASTER. And they won't be very happy when they get there.

ALASDAIR. That they won't; but we leave them with God. Now I must be getting home.

SCHOOLMASTER'S WIFE. Not till you get a cup of tea, Alasdair.

When he was sipping the hot savoury tea, Alasdair invoked the blessing of Heaven on the man who first brought tea to Britain. "Next to the Uisge-Beatha it is the noblest of drinks." And then before he went he reverted to his trouble:

"It is with us, I fear, as it was with the people of whom the blessed King David sang: they 'lusted exceedingly in the wilderness, and tempted God in the desert. And He gave them their request;' but sent leanness into their soul.' No doubt He will give us Ben Lee just to show us how little it is really worth. And if we go on hating and fighting and breaking the law that we may get it, then leanness of soul will be ours."

## § 5

THERE was nobody in all Braes for whom I felt greater affection than I felt for Alasdair MacChallum. For the whole Island could not show another seannachie who could equal Alasdair. And he, no doubt, recognised in the eager boy who listened to his tales as if life depended on them a spirit after his own heart. It was quite natural that I should accompany Alasdair a part of the way. A few yards south of the school, across the road, lay a little meadow. The burn and a high bank beyond it guarded one side, and a soft rounded bank the other two sides. In the summer days at the play-hour when seventy children of all ages played the games which children have played since schools began, that meadow presented a scene that for loveliness could not be excelled. The law would not allow Gaelic to be spoken in the school; but on the playground no language was spoken but it. There is no song like the song of a little river, and the song of the burn was the undertone of our joyous merriment. If we spoke a word of Gaelic in the school, we were duly punished with a stroke of the tawse on the bare palm. Nothing could be more futile than that teaching which sought to educate little children by a language of which they did not know a word! What would an English child of five make of it if he were put into a school where no word of English (his only language) were allowed to be spoken? Only the geniuses would profit by such schooling. That was why the little meadow was so dear to the children. When one o'clock came they poured out of the school like prisoners released. They ran to the meadow shouting Gaelic to one another, feeling as exiles who are restored to their true heritage. That hour when they ran and danced over the turf which generations of children had beaten with their bare feet into a level sheen that would do credit to a palace redeemed the day.

When we were passing the little meadow, in the mouth of the night,

Alasdair stood still and turned towards it. He stood just a couple of yards before coming to the bridge spanning the burn. I looked at him, and his face suddenly grew soft and ethereal, and a sort of film fell on his eyes.

"Thormoid, a ghraidh," said he, speaking very slowly, as if he were speaking out of a mist, "remember what I am now saying: the day is coming when the joyous voices of children will no longer be heard on lineag na scholairean" (the scholars' meadow).

"How do you know, Alasdair?" I whispered, awed by his voice and the change in his face.

"I know, because I see the meadow covered with bracken from end to end; and bracken does not grow where children run with dancing feet. It is a sore burden this that I have to carry."

And I looked at the meadow, and the turf was beginning to glow with the first promise of spring, and it was smooth as a lawn well-rolled for centuries. And it sounded to me as an idle tale.

We walked in silence to the top of the brae where the road dips down to the Cumhag, and there we parted for the night.

"Run home, Thormoid, my hero," said Alasdair, "for the gloaming is the time when the other world appears. And I would not that you should come to bear my burden."

And my feet scarcely touched the road as I ran home.

## § 6.

THAT was in April 1882. In the year 1938 I asked my wife, who was driving, to stop the car at the bridge where Alasdair and I had stood so long ago. We had come from Portree in ten minutes or so instead of the two hours it took me once to walk it. But what a walk that was as I revelled in the unveiling of fresh beauty round every bend! That day, so recently, we left the car and walked up the burn, and I showed my wife the pool where I learned to swim and where generation after generation of boys learned to swim. But we could not walk over lineag na scholairean, for it was covered with thick bracken from end to end.

And there at the bridge I told her of that meadow fifty-six years ago, of the lovely turf smoothed by little bare feet, and of the games we played, and how Alasdair had foretold what we now saw, on that very spot where we stood, fifty-six years ago.

"He must have been a seer," she said, and we passed on to the Cumhag.

If you think that this is a pure tale of the imagination, and if you

doubt its veracity (as well you may so strange a tale), all you need do is to walk from Portree on a sunny day, and please stop at the top of every brae on that hilly, twisting road (the most beautiful I know), and when you come to the bridge that unites Ollach to Gedintailor, turn to the right, facing the hills, and there before your eyes you will see *lineag na scholairean* covered with dense bracken from end to end.

There is no sound there now but the song of the little river. The school is long closed; for where there were 150 children in the Braes there are now 20. He gave them Ben Lee but sent leanness into their soul.

The older I grow, and now I hear in the night the last enemy (who is really man's greatest friend) tapping gently at the door, the more certain I become that we are citizens of two worlds, the one visible and temporary, the other invisible and eternal, and that it is given to a few elect souls to see glimpses of our true home. And I entirely agree with my wife when she said that Alasdair must have been a seer.



## THE BATTLE OF THE BRAES

## § 1

IN THE GREY DAWN OF 18TH APRIL 1882 a force of seventy police set out for the seven miles' march from Portree to Balmeanach in Braes to arrest the law-breakers who had deforced the sheriff-officer and his coadjutors. Nobody could have wished a more forbidding reception on the part of the elements. The rain swept down Glen Varagil in sheets driven by a south-wester that blew with ice in its teeth. Before the blue-coated host sheered off to the left opposite Peinmore and crossed the river on the wooden footbridge, the men were wet to the skin. No greatcoats could stand up to rain driven by such a wind. The snow-capped peaks of the Coolins once and again suddenly emerged between the cloud-wracks, and the chill blast seemed to beat with an icier edge. "The Cowcaddens is a perfect heaven compared to this," said a burly policeman to his mate. "Give me the Saltmarket every time," was the response. A more pitiful, bedraggled band of men could not be seen in the world than these minions of the law who, passing along the road above Penefieler, sloped their helmets towards their right shoulders and heard the rain falling off them as a cascade. The larger number of this valiant host had been lent by the City of Glasgow at the urgent appeal of Sheriff Ivory. Every other police authority, whose aid he entreated for the suppression of the law-breakers in Skye, refused. The City of Glasgow, having considered what might happen if the same lawless spirit spread to the south side of the river, sent fifty men. Never were upholders of law and order more disgusted than were these policemen when they realised the duty that was assigned them. If any had the insight to perceive what they felt as they leaned up against that rain-lashing south-wester, they would appear the most-to-be-pitied band of men that ever marched along that road. They were sent to do a job which the rest of Scotland scorned to do.

At the bealach of Achnahanaid a wagonette rumbled up behind them and stopped. Out of it there stepped Sheriff Ivory, the Sheriff

of the County; Sheriff-Substitute Spiers, who administered the law in the Island, subject to the oversight of Ivory; Procurator Fiscal of the County, Anderson, and Joseph MacIennan, his deputy at Portree; and they took their place at the tail of the dreary, sodden procession now approaching the sleeping townships of thatched houses, there to rehabilitate the law in all its austere majesty. Of all things it is the most difficult to be majestic when your clothes are as if they had been lifted out of a river and the rain drips from your nose. These poor policemen had never seen a crofting township before. When they had to surround these humble houses, with the ash-pits at the doors, and with no visible chimneys, there fell on them a sudden sense of humiliation. There is nothing more damaging to a man in the struggle of life than to lose self-respect. The champions of the law felt their ardour evaporate at every pore as their boots filled with rain and every step seemed to be through a pool.

The responsibility for this foray lay with Sheriff Ivory, and we must consider him a moment. His appearance is not impressive: not what we would like to see in a bulwark of law and order. He was a small man, five feet three inches or so in height. His restless eyes betokened nervous strain. There was no suggestion of intellectual gifts in his face. Edinburgh can show men such as this by the hundred: men whose showy façade veils emptiness. His father had been a Senator of the Supreme Court, and it was almost inevitable, as things then were, that Lord Ivory's son should have been made a sheriff apart from any fitness for the post. When a weak man finds himself in an office that demands force of character and administrative gifts, his efforts to prove himself equal to the task are often disastrous. Ivory belonged to that class who later became known as shell-back Tories. The self-complacency of that layer of society in Edinburgh was only excelled by their devoted support of the upper dog.

## § 2

THE city of Edinburgh produced then more of these arid legal personalities than any city in the world. The reason for that was that it was, and still is, a truncated city. It is a capital city but without a king; it has a Parliament House but no parliament; it has a Palace but no prince to dwell therein; its streets and houses bear historic names of the days of chivalry but the historic families have all gone. The shell of a capital city is still there, but, alas! it is an empty shell. The result is that the Judges of the Court of Session are garbed in an import such as they possess nowhere else on earth. The apex of the

social order consists of Judges who bear designations such as Lord Braxfield or Lord Gledfield or Lord Ivory. These were the men who sent any who dared agitate for reform to Botany Bay without the tremor of an eyelid. When Sheriff Ivory learned of the resistance to oppression by the people of Braes, he hailed it as a heaven-sent opportunity of justifying the system which so naturally placed the son of a Lord of Session in a sheriff's chair. . . . As for the others who arrived in that wagonette to enforce the brave band, they need not detain us. Sheriff Spiers, amiable and sociable, was of the class who cloak failure at the Bar by accepting a sub-sheriffship. The designation, Sheriff-Substitute, places them. As for Anderson, the County Fiscal, and Maclellan his deputy, they were most respectable members of a profession that in those days combined the practice of law for private profit with the duties of a State functionary. The duty of these three men was to act as prosecutors and judge: and neither a Judge nor Fiscals ought to act as a policeman. Yet these men were there to help to arrest those whom it should have been their duty to judge. But they were there by order of their superior, Ivory, who was determined to show how resolute and strong a man he was.

So these Judges and Fiscals march behind the soaking policemen, and if you scan their faces you can see at once that two of them, Anderson and Maclellan, are profoundly disturbed and ill at ease. For they are Highlanders and know the people whom they have set forth to seize. As for Ivory and Spiers, they knew no more of the Highlander than the salmon that comes into Loch Sligachan knows of the stag on the Macdonald Deer Forest or the eagle nesting in the Coolins.

But Ivory felt that he was in an impregnable position. Every great organ of public opinion had called for strong action to vindicate the law. "The Queen's Writ must run everywhere"—that was a favourite phrase of leading articles in every city from London to Aberdeen. And he knew also that in his purpose to stamp out all opposition to oppression and eviction he would be almost unanimously supported by his own profession. For the Faculty of Advocates and the Senators of the Supreme Court had read for a hundred years of the devastation wrought by the Duchess of Sutherland, by the Marquis of Breadalbane, and by scores of their imitators; of smoking glens and women and children cast helpless and homeless on the mercy of the elements; and they raised no voice of protest, nor instituted any campaign to make law the shield of the oppressed. Nobody knew the rights of landlords better than the Faculty of Advocates, and nobody could be blinder to landlords' duties. . . . Sheriff Ivory had not walked a mile after leaving the wagonette before he also was wet to the skin and his boots squelching

out the rain. His eye caught a line of spindrift running like the trail of a comet across the Sound to Raasay, and he turned to his poor deputy, who by this time was shivering, and exclaimed: "What a climate!"

"Yes," was the response, "a climate in which it rains ceaselessly for days with occasional showers."

"That is a mixed description, isn't it?" said Ivory.

"Not at all mixed," answered Spiers. "A continuous drizzle diversified by occasional plumps."

So the feet of the invading host squelched the rain out of their boots, leaned slightly to the right against the south-westerly gale, and shivered as little streams of rain-drops oozed in below the collars of their coats. It was a loathsome task theirs; and the elements proclaimed their disapproval.

At Achnahanaid a boy who went out to get water from the well saw them, and he left the pail at the well and ran. Pheidippides, who ran to Athens bearing the news of Salamis and fell dead as he cried to the Athenian Council, "Rejoice, we conquer," did not run faster than that boy who put in his head at door after door and cried, "The police are on the way: get up and fight." When he came to Alasdair MacChallum's house and gave his cry, Alasdair was out of bed in a moment, threw on his homespun clothes, and climbed the steep brae in a few minutes. He got to the top of the ridge just as the vanguard came in sight up the brae from Gedintailor, and he stood on the hillock watching them, tremulous with excitement. But, strange to say, Alasdair's anxiety and overwhelming emotion did not spring from the thought that he himself might be seized and put in prison; what stirred him to the depths was the question—Will they stop just where I saw them stop in the taisge?<sup>1</sup> And as he watched them go past he kept muttering to himself: Exactly as I saw them: Joseph MacIennan the Fiscal, and Spiers the Sheriff, just where I saw them; and the little man with the shifty eyes—just as I saw him; and Angus Martin the sheriff-officer, and two men behind (newspaper reporters) just as I saw them.

By this time the invaders approached the spot where he had seen them stop. "Oh, they are going past," he moaned, for they showed no sign of stopping. He trembled with his sense of frustration. He was a false taisghear. Then the voice of the Police Inspector rang out: "Halt!"

"The very spot," cried Alasdair in sudden exultation. "Just where I saw them stop in the wision."

<sup>1</sup> Vision.

There came over the heart of Alasdair a glow of ecstasy such as he had never experienced. His eyes shone and his face was irradiated as with beams from the heavenly Jerusalem. The Kingdom which no eye has as yet seen had there vindicated the truth of the faint glows of light that presaged its advent. The world of strife and conflict vanished, and on the hillock Alasdair felt as if he should kneel down in the very presence of God. For now he knew for certain that he was of those to whom God whispers His secret as if He said, Shall I hide from Alasdair that which I do!

"Who is that old man? Is he listed for arrest?" asked Ivory of his deputy.

"I don't know the Braes people," answered Spiers, his teeth chattering, "but I shall ask Martin."

"He is the most honest man in the Island," answered Martin, "and he is greatly esteemed for his gift of the second sight."

"Second sight!" ejaculated Ivory. "That is just blank nonsense."

## § 3

THERE were six men to be arrested, and the Inspector of Police detailed six policemen to arrest each of them at the same time. The sheriff-officer led off and showed the houses to be entered. Swiftly and methodically the little groups of police made for each house. As two of the accused resided in one house, it had ten police assigned for its attack. The two men were putting on their clothes when the police walked in. Mary Nicolson, the wife of James Nicolson, had the big pot on the fire with the water just coming to the boil, and she was on the point of adding the meal to make the morning porridge. Slowly and deliberately she detached the big pot of boiling water from the chain and hurled its contents at the nearest policeman. With a quick movement he averted his face, and the hot water spent itself on his clothes. "Thank you," said he, "hot water is very welcome as a change from the ice-cold rain with which I am soaked." The men offered no opposition. The other four accused crofters were seized half-dressed. In less than half an hour six dazed, breakfastless prisoners were brought to Ivory and his coadjutors, and placed in the centre of the host. In ones and twos the people rushed up the brae to the road and menaced the invaders. Stones began to be thrown. The word of command was given and the police set out for Portree.

Only two of the three townships had as yet assembled their people for the defence of their kindred and their homes. The boy from Achnahanaid had passed on his warning to Sam Nicolson, who ran

like the wind to Peinchorran. But most of the houses were still wrapped in silence; and sleepy voices bade Sam begone. But the clamour he made roused them. Time, however, was lost, and the question arose on all sides: "Where are the Peinchorran men?" Just as the invaders began their march back with their prisoners, Sam came running along the road from Tor-na-cro. "They are coming," he cried. "They will be too late," said Alasdair.

It was then that Angus MacBhannain took charge. "Run to the Cumhag and stop them there," he called out to the crowd, and himself led the way. His wife, Mary Ann, a sister of James Nicolson, ran beside him. Sam took command of the boys and girls. "To the Cumhag," he cried, and led the way. But as he had been running for half an hour through Peinchorran, he was soon outstripped. The police kept to the road, and the people ran straight to their goal across Alt na golag and through the croft of Eoin 'ic Domhuill 'ic Ian 'ic Eoin, and gathered on the steep slope above the pass before the police arrived. When the invaders reached the south end of the pass, they were met with a fusillade of stones and clods. Sam had some twenty boys and girls under his command. They filled their pockets with sharp flints.

"They have no guns," cried Sam; "let us charge them: throw the stones and then run back up the brae."

And this they did, hurling down the slope like a mountain torrent. Stopping where Sam stopped, a rain of stones descended on the police. Sheriff Ivory, the sacred representative of Queen Victoria, the embodiment of law and order, was hit with a clod on the jaw. For Sam never missed the target. The Sheriff's teeth were set on edge and he held his jaw with both hands. His depute, Spiers, was struck with a clod in the face. The men and women were gathering large boulders to roll down on the invaders when they entered the pass. The fusillade of stones from the light infantry commanded by Sam never ceased. The women were foremost, and Widow Nicolson raised to heaven a ceaseless litany of imprecations. "May the curse of heaven be upon you, ye sons of Belial; may the fires of hell consume you, ye whelps of Satan."

Angus MacBhannain, while the Inspector of Police and Sheriff Ivory stood discussing the situation, suddenly called out, "They are coming at last," and the whole body of the defenders looked south, and there, a quarter of a mile away, were the Peinchorran men running to the help of their comrades. Sam described the scene to me afterwards. "You remember the Battle of Bannockburn," said he, "when over the ridge there came the Scots camp followers, and the English

thought they were a new army and broke and fled. So it was here. The Inspector ordered half his force to charge up the brae with their batons; and the rest with the prisoners to rush at the double through the pass."

This they did. Drawing their batons, half the police ran up the slope and attacked the stone-throwers. The head of Widow Nicolson was cracked as she poured out her maledictions. Murdo the Bard, well in the rear, threw ineffective missiles. The youngsters broke and fled. Sam stood his ground and got a blow that stunned him. From the top of the narrow pass the men came running to save the women. Then, at the word of command, the escort of the prisoners rushed through the pass into the open, and the rearguard ran after. The pass was forced and the Battle of the Braes was won by Sheriff Ivory and the forces of law and order.

It did not last more than a quarter of an hour or so. Sam said it was the most exciting quarter of an hour in all the world; and that it would have ended quite differently if the Peinchorran men had only arrived five minutes sooner. "For the Peinchorran men," said he, "are great fighters, especially Cluny and Ronald and Donald Somhairle. But when they were half through Ewen's croft the last of the police were through the pass and Angus could only roll one big boulder down on them, and it missed."

The Peinchorran men were received with jeers. All they would do was to go up to the top of the hill, to the spot where the boys had kept watch, and there gaze at the retreating police so long as they were in sight. I remember that morning so well. When I looked out of the window at nine o'clock, there was the group of men gesticulating on the top of the hill while the rain was driving in sheets from Ben Lee. And there they decided that in the evening they would march to Portree, storm the jail, and free the prisoners.

Two hours later the sodden force marched into Portree with their prisoners in the midst. Sheriff Ivory held his head erect. Law and order were vindicated. The Queen's Writ now ran in the Isle of Skye. He had crushed a rebellion. He warmed his hands at the fires of the future. The Queen had made General Napier a Lord—Lord Napier of Magdala—how splendid it sounded. What honour would the Queen confer on him for putting down a rebellion that threatened her throne? Lord Ivory of the Braes!—how satisfying to the ear such a designation; it was the least she could do! But what is this? The police, footsore and limping and steaming with the rain and damp, marched over the bridge into the village. And what a crowd on the roadside to welcome them! Why are they not cheering? Cheering! A hiss began at the

## THE BATTLE OF THE BRAES

bridge, and through a hissing, jeering, mocking crowd of villagers the police marched dejectedly to the jail. "Mile Mollochd oirbh a chloinn a diabhuill" rose on all sides. The hissing of an angry crowd is the direst sound on earth. Sheriff Ivory felt his dreams of greatness melt into thin air as he entered the hotel and ordered a hot bath. After that storm of hissing he did not feel so sure of Queen Victoria's gracious smile.



## IO.

### TO THE RESCUE

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#### § I

THAT DAY IN APRIL 1882 was the most tense that I have experienced in a long lifetime. There was not a more law-abiding community in the Three Kingdoms than we were, and yet six of our number were dragged, hungry, insufficiently clad, unwashed, through a storm of wind and rain, walking seven miles to Portree, and there placed in prison cells. Nobody in our day had heard of a Braes man having been in prison; and there these six men were who had done no injury and broken no law. For, mark you, taking a salmon from a river, a grouse from the moor, or a deer from the high hills, was never a crime in the eyes of their race. God alone made these, and by His bounty were they fed, and He had not handed them over as a monopoly to any man. We carefully distinguished between man-made laws and God-made laws; and the latter we held inviolate. As for the man-made laws, we never deemed it a dishonour to anyone to disregard them; but we were hitherto careful to keep to the windward of these manufactured laws. No doubt in England poachers had been sent to Botany Bay, but never in our Island. Deeply devout and most religious men would come home in the morning with a gleaming salmon; and having carefully cut off the dorsal fin before reaching their house, would afterwards declare solemnly, "I have not taken a fin home this year." We were, in very truth, a pious, God-fearing community; and it stabbed us to the heart that our neighbours should now be in prison. Shivering, soaked to the skin, in these cells which so far had only sheltered tinkers and drunks. It was intolerable.

All the long day, messengers came and went through the townships. Plans were made. All able-bodied men were to proceed to Portree and meet in Somerled Square at 9 o'clock. A mast was to be used as a battering-ram, and the jail would be burst open and the poor maltreated prisoners released. Tyrants would be cast down from their seats. They would lay their case before the Queen, and she, God bless her, would see justice done to the oppressed. For did

she not love Highlanders, and had she not actually taught Gaelic to her children!

In school on that day no lessons were learnt, and we were dismissed early. Sam whistled me out of the house. He was manifestly heading for the town. "Thormoid," he asked, "are you coming to Portree tonight?"

"No," I replied, "I would never be allowed."

"Well," said Sam, "that is a pity; for the greatest event in the history of the Island is to take place tonight." And he sped on his way, whistling as he went.

## § 2

As the evening approached, band after band went past the school-house, talking loudly and gesticulating freely. All carried stout sticks but no other weapon. "Cluny" Macpherson could be heard a mile away, denouncing factors and sheriffs and landlords such as Captain Fraser who had bought Kilmuir and trebled the rents on the poor crofters. The Morair (Lord Macdonald) never did shameful things like that. When Ben Lee was taken from them, the Morair of the day was only twelve years old. It was the doing of "Fear a Choire." There was no ground so thin and poor but dockans and factors would flourish on it. But that night would see factors and unjust judges humbled in the dust. Thus "Cluny" shouted as he swung his heavy stick, and people heard afar and smiled. Many came in to see my mother in passing, and bade her the farewell as of those who know not what the morrow may bring.

The most serious of them all was the bard. "This is a solemn time," said the bard, sipping a cup of tea. "My one concern is what is to become of Mary and the children."

"What can happen to them with you always at hand to help and succour?" answered my mother.

"That's the difficulty," went on the bard, "for this morning I struck such a blow on a policeman that I am sure I cracked his skull. Now, if we are beaten tonight and I am captured, what will happen to me? If the policeman dies, I'll be hanged; and if he recovers, I'll be transported. I couldn't eat my food today for thinking of it."

"Every policeman walked past this house," said my mother. "There was none so hurt that they could not walk seven miles. You can be quite easy in your mind."

"Wounds in the head," replied the bard, refusing to be comforted, "only become critical and fatal hours afterwards. He no doubt walked

past this house, but he may be dead before morning. For I gave him the hardest whack my hand ever gave."

"That may be," comforted my mother, "but I never heard that you ever injured anyone. And I feel sure the policeman is safe enough."

"And judging by his swear-words," concluded the bard, "I would say that he was an Irishman. That makes my mind easier. For an Irishman's skull is thick."

I accompanied the bard up to the road.

"Murdo," I asked, "was it a great fight this morning?"

"Thormoid, my calf," said he, "it was the greatest fight since Bannockburn. The blood was in rivulets running over the cliff. But the torrents of rain swept the blood into the sea. For yards from the shore the sea was crimson. It was a terrible sight. Good for you, Thormoid, my brave, that you were spared that awful scene and that you were snoring in your bed while we were fighting for life and freedom."

"No, Murdo, I never snore," said I, turning back to the house.

"What was Murdo telling you, talking so earnestly?" asked my mother. And I told her the conversation word for word. At which she laughed in the most unfeeling manner.

"Oh!" she said, her laughter trailing into silence, "isn't that like Murdo the Bard. For Red William was here in the afternoon and told me all about the battle. And I remember that he said that Murdo the Bard kept far in the rear all the time, and that he only threw one clod, which never so much as came near a policeman!"

And she laughed again and then plied the rolling-pin on the scones with renewed vigour. I think she wished that the dough under the roller was Murdo the Bard!

I do not now remember all of those heroic bands that marched past with loud exclamations. But I do remember Donald the fox-trapper. He was one of the very few Macleans in the district. And he stepped off the road to speak to me.

"Thormoid," said he, "do you know the rallying-cry of our clan?"

"Yes, I do," I replied. "Beatha neo bas" (Life or Death).

"Good for you, Thormoid," said he. "You know a great deal for such a little chap. But there's another rallying-cry of the Macleans."

"I don't know another."

"It was at the Battle of Killiecrankie," he explained, "and Hector the young Chief of Duart was killed. When his foster-brother saw that he was dead, he rushed on the enemy, and as man after man fell before his claymore he cried 'Fear eile air son Eachainn' (Another for

Hector). So the full rallying-cry of the clan ever since has been 'Beatha neo bas: fear eile air son Eachainn.'

"Thank you, Donald," I said, "that's the best rallying-cry of all the clans."

"I think so too," said he, "and tonight with us it's 'Beatha neo bas.'"

The last to go past was Padruig Domhullach and his son Hamish. Padruig's wife was a daughter of Alasdair the Seer, and I often met him in his father-in-law's house. He was a wiry man of forty or so, and Hamish was a strong and sturdy youth of eighteen years. Padruig was stolid, and his face as well as said "It is a thing that must be done and I'll do it." But Hamish's eyes were dancing with the excitement of the day.

"We are late," explained Padruig, "for his mother tried to keep Hamish at home. She only gave in when her father told her that no harm would come to the boy. She has a great faith in her father."

"The others passed an hour ago," I said, falling into step beside Hamish.

"That is as it should be," said Padruig, "for the slogan of the Macdonalds is ever true: 'Na Domhnallaich aig deireadh an la'" (The Clan Donald at the end of the day).

"What is the meaning of that slogan?"

"It means that when the other clans fainted and came nigh to failing it was only then the Macdonalds roused themselves and put on victory as they would a garment. Whatever battle at which they were given their rightful place, the right, that battle they won. It was so at Bannockburn; but at Culloden they were put on the left, and they, owing to their hurt pride, refused to charge. Keppoch alone with sword and claymore charged the enemy, crying out, 'My God, have the children of my tribe forsaken me?' and so fell, facing the foe."

Padruig was a notable seannachie and he knew how to produce a climax. "Excuse me, Padruig," I said, "but if you are right about Culloden, my father is wrong. For he once explained to me that the Macdonalds refused to charge at Culloden because their flank was turned; that the best soldiers in all the world will not advance when the bullets come upon them from the front and side."

"Your father said that!" exclaimed Padruig, coming to a halt at the beach of Achnahaid. "But it is only what I would expect from a foreigner like him."

"Foreigner!" I protested. "My father is not a foreigner."

"Yes, he is," maintained Padruig; "he came from Coigach, the country of that ruddy clan, the Mackenzies. A Mackenzie went out one morning in Gairloch and shot three MacLeods dead, and after

breakfast he noted his deeds in a book: 'Shot three MacLeods before breakfast: a good bag for one morning.' A foreigner from Coigach, the land of the Mackenzies, that's what he is. Your mother has more knowledge in her little finger than your father in his whole body. But nobody can blame him; for what can anyone expect from a foreigner?"

At that I turned back, and Padruig and Hamish set out over the bealach at a good speed: not walking and not running but half-way between. They were determined that once more the slogan of the Macdonalds would prove true: "Na Domhnallaich aig deireadh an la."

When I got back my mother was preparing our supper. The big pot was on the fire and the water boiling musically, and she was letting the meal fall in a circular shower into the pot. That is one of the most beautiful sights in the world. There is a soft glow in the chimney rising from the low flame under the pot, and through that radiance there streams fan-like the cascade of the yellow meal. I have seen the sunshine in early spring turn the waterfall beside our house into a radiance very like oatmeal falling into a boiling porridge-pot.

"Mother," said I suddenly, for I was full of what Padruig had said, "Mother, is my father a foreigner?"

She turned round suddenly, so startled that some of the meal fell from her hand into the flame.

"My boy," she asked, "what put that thought into your head?"

"Padruig Macdonald said so." Then I told her of my conversation with Padruig and Hamish as I walked a bit of the road with them.

"Padruig is just a spider," she declared as she turned the stick round and round in the porridge-pot as it bubbled on the fire.

"A spider," I echoed; "there is no resemblance."

"Isn't there?" said she. "A spider spins a fine web out of nothing, and so does Padruig. But I am unjust to the spider. For his web is a thing of beauty but Padruig's is nasty, with often a bad odour."

"Padruig's spinning is not all of a bad flavour," I rejoined, "for he said a very nice thing about you, Mother."

At that she turned round, the porridge-stick in her hand, and looked at me. "What did he say?" she asked curtly.

"Well, what he said was this," I explained; "he said that you were worth a dozen of my father and that you had more wisdom in your little finger than he has in his whole body."

At that she gave the porridge-stick a twirl and laid it down while with great deliberation she lifted the pot off the hook. Then she passed judgment on Padruig.

"That good man," said she, "spins long yarns with no substance in them; but at times, far and between, he lapses into the truth."

Then she told me how a man from Uig, twenty miles away in our own Island, married a woman in Achnahanaid and settled there, and how he was called a foreigner all his life. "To people who live narrow lives everybody outside a few miles is a foreigner," she concluded.

"Well, I am glad," said I, "for when Padruig said it I felt as if my father had been a Frenchman or a Turk."

"Nothing Padruig says is worth heeding," she summed up as she ladled the fragrant porridge into plates: "nothing except the grain of truth in the bushel of chaff—and that grain of truth he comes upon by accident."

At that my father came in. He had been surveying the road from the top of the hill above the Cumhag.

"I have seen nobody on the road since Padruig and Hamish passed," he informed us. "They have all gone now."

And silence fell upon us.

### § 3

THE night was stamped on my memory by an unprecedented occurrence at our evening worship. Truth compels me to record that I found that half-hour wearisome to the last degree. The Bible is full of lovely tales of wonder and fear and love, but I never heard my father read a word out of the Sacred Book except St. Paul's epistles. And on six days out of seven it would be Romans. That high debate of sin and judgment was quite beyond a boy's comprehension: so I just *tholed*. But the prayer was the greatest trial of all. For twenty minutes he would hold high debate with the Almighty regarding foreknowledge and predestination and election: assuring the Supreme Judge that though all mankind roasted in eternal flames yet that the Creator would be just in all His ways. At times he would break out into a paean of thanksgiving for God's goodness to him. He had done nothing to deserve it, yet God had put him among the Elect while the vast, vast multitude were thrust into hell. The very thought loosed a rapture of adoration. While I, poor mortal, shivered with terror on my aching knees.

But tonight all was changed. And the change was so complete that it was a perfect revolution. The worship that night began with the 46th Psalm sung to "Martyrdom":

*God is our refuge and our strength,  
In straits a present aid.*

And it was inevitably followed by Romans, chapter viii. Now, I knew

that chapter by heart, so there was no need to listen. But suddenly my attention was gripped. For a red-hot emotion suddenly broke through the words; just as a surly fire suddenly leaps into devouring flame. "If God be for us, who can be against us?" read my father, and his voice rose like a battle-cry defying the world. The words ring out in English, but in Gaelic, as he now read them, they were as a trampet rallying a host to victory. When he came to the glorious climax, "More than conquerors," his voice broke, and the tears were running down my mother's cheeks.

Then we all knelt down and he prayed. Now this prayer was utterly different from all that I had heard before. There was one familiar sentence at the beginning: "From everlasting to everlasting Thou art God, and we the creatures of a day bow down before Thee, asking only this, that our weakness and helplessness appeal to Thy pity." And then he quite forgot about the eternal decrees and the Covenants of Grace, and began to speak to the All-Father, quite simply, about the poor men in prison and their distracted families, and about those who had gone to rescue them.

O God, Thou knowest how poor they are; and how ignorant of Thy law. They have broken the laws of men, save them from breaking Thy law. If any hand be raised to smite, restrain Thou it, O Lord. If any man be tempted through anger to kill, save Thou him, O Lord. Let there be no Joabs found among them. Bring them in safety home to their families.

It was then that the unexpected broke in upon us. For Morag, our maid-servant, whose father and two brothers had gone past the house two hours before to deliver their kindred from the tyrant, and to loose the prisoners from their bonds, suddenly broke into a storm of weeping. Her long-drawn sobs seemed to shake the house. My father suddenly said Amen, and we rose from our knees, shaken.

"Let us go to bed," said my father. "We can do no good by sitting up." So we retired to rest. About midnight I was awakened by the tramping of feet on the road. I sat up in bed and listened. There it was, tramp, tramp, growing louder as it drew near and then dying down fainter and fainter as it passed, tramp, tramp. I lay down again. And a quarter of an hour later it came again, that tramp, tramp, getting firm and then fading away.

"They are coming back," I said to myself, "and I hope they have brought the prisoners with them."

But there was not a sound from the road but tramp, tramp.

NEXT to the factor the most influential man in Portree was Lachlan Ross, the proprietor of the Royal Hotel. He began life as a herdboys to the minister of Strath, and he then considered himself richly rewarded by a wage of £3 the half-year. He never forgot that, Dr. Mackinnon had taught him to read and so laid the foundation of his good fortune. As he prospered in the world he more and more came to consider himself a member of the minister's family. I remember so well the morning after Dr. Mackinnon's death, I was on my way to Inverness to school, and there on the steamer was Lachlan Ross garbed in funereal black, on his way to Kilbride, to take his part in the funeral rites of his old benefactor. I can still see the faces of the men as Lachlan Ross stepped into the ferry-boat at Broadford. They looked as those who greeted a member of a family just bereaved. He loved to use sonorous words when he spoke English; but he could do kind and generous acts. And he was a man of many wiles.

No man was more concerned about the sudden danger that threatened the capital of the Island than Lachie Ross. It is strange that hotel-keepers should be invariably conservatives of the bluest dye; Lachie Ross was no exception. He was an unbending upholder of the old order. He could not think of the Island without Lord Macdonald, nor of Portree without His Lordship's factor. He had an old cannon placed on the top of the brae in front of the hotel, and whenever *The Lady of the Isles*<sup>1</sup> came steaming round the headland of Camustinavaig, Lachie Ross would fire a salute. And when the yacht passed the Black Rock he would fire another. But he never had known a day such as this when the six Braes crofters, dishevelled, hungry, and soaked with rain, were lodged in the jail. When the crowd of villagers hissed the police, Lachie tried to raise a cheer, but not a voice joined in. The only way he found of expressing his loyalty was by providing a specially hot bath for Sheriff Ivory.

As the day advanced, rumour succeeded rumour in Portree. The Braes men were coming in force at night to storm the jail. The men of Camustinavaig and Achnahanaid and Ollach and Glenmore and Penefieler were to join them. Every man in Portree would swell their ranks. For there were no upholders of law and order left in the little town except the factor and Lachie. And worst of all, the Police Inspector over a glass of whisky told Lachie, in confidence, that the Glasgow police were disgusted with what they had to do; that they were restor-

<sup>1</sup> Lord Macdonald's yacht.



ing their self-respect at the various refreshment bars, and that they would not, he feared, put up a fight. It seemed to Lachie then as if the pillars of the firmament were falling. No man's life or property would be safe in the Island if the Braes law-breakers were not taught a lesson.

At last, at noon, a great idea suddenly flashed on Lachie's mind. And he immediately walked over to the factor's office. Now the factor was Captain of the local company of Volunteers, the 4th Company of the Queen's Own Cameron Highlanders, and Lachie was Lieutenant. And nobody ever realised the dignity inherent in the Skyemen until they saw Lachie in full uniform walking across Somerled Square.

"These are serious days, Mr. Macdonald," said Lachie to the factor. "There is no doubt the town is to be invaded tonight. The Braes rebels are coming in their hundreds to storm the jail. If rioting once begins, they will break into the hotel cellars. The town may be burnt down. Something must be done."

"I quite agree," said the factor, "but it is difficult to know what to do."

"I have just thought of a plan of operations," said Lachie. "We will call out the Volunteers and have a march before it is dusk along the Glenvargill road."

"What good would that do?" objected the factor, "for you know every man of the Volunteers in his heart is with the Braes men, and only one or two are loyal in the town."

"That is so," rejoined Lachie, "and I seem to remember that a man in the Bible said once, 'I even I only am left,' yet he gained the day. And there are two of us."

And Lachie expanded his chest, hit the table with his fist and looked across it at the factor, who had passed a sleepless night.

"There is nobody to help us in the town," said the factor.

"We don't need anyone," explained Lachie. "My plan takes no consideration of the Volunteers fighting. If they fought, it would be the Glasgow police they would fight. But the Braes men do not know that. But we know what a power there is in the very sight of the Red-coats; the swish of the kilts as soldiers march along the road in itself commands obedience and respect; and the sight of a disciplined force wearing the Queen's uniform will of itself put the Braes men to flight. Discipline, Mr. Macdonald, is the secret of victory."

The factor thought for a moment, while Lachie tapped the table. "There is something in your plan," he said at last. "But, as factor, I cannot make use of the Volunteers to serve my own ends."

"I am a neutral," exclaimed Lachie, "and I can do it if you have no objection."

"A neutral!" said the factor. "A moment ago you said that you and I were the only upholders of law left."

"Yes," said Lachie, "a neutral so far as quarrels and disputes about land are concerned: but not neutral between law and law-breakers."

"All right," agreed the factor. "You carry on with your plan."

In a short time notices were posted up calling the Volunteers to a full-dress parade at seven o'clock with all arms. And the rumour went through the village like heather on fire that the Braes men were to loot the town that night. Nobody, however, took that rumour too seriously. Another rumour had it that the Braes men were to storm the jail at nine o'clock. The Volunteers assured each other that the parade would be over by then and that individually they would be free to help the defenders of liberty from Braes. When towards evening the news spread that the vanguard of the liberators had reached Peinmore and were there waiting for reinforcements from the other districts, the townsmen had no longer any doubt. The jail would be stormed that night and the prisoners freed. Down at the quay the mast of a drifter was prepared for its duty as battering-ram.

The parade of the Volunteers in Somerled Square became famous throughout the Island not because of the gallantry of the officers and men in thus mustering in a perilous hour. It is recorded in letters of brass on the tablets of the Island memory because of the novel form of command given by Lieutenant Lachlan Ross, who was in command. Not only was Lieutenant Ross very fond of using long English words, but when he got any way excited he mixed his native Gaelic with his acquired English with a terseness which greatly improved both languages. In Somerled Square the company assembled, some fifty men of tried valour, in kilt and hose and bearing their arms proudly; and Lieutenant Ross put them through their drill. At last he gave the order which immortalised him: "Fix beaglets and prepare for calvary!"<sup>1</sup> And without the twitch of a muscle these heroes obeyed the command.

## § 5

THE Braes vanguard had assembled at Peinmore and there waited for reinforcements from the outlying townships. But alas! none came. The track that led up the steep brae across the river to Glenmore was eagerly scanned, but no recruit appeared. A scout reported that the road to Penefieler was empty. Camustinavaig had sent none. The villagers did not pour out to welcome them. The clouds were banking

<sup>1</sup> "Fix bayonets and prepare for cavalry."

up in the south-west for another night of rain and wind. Doubts began to steal into their minds; but nobody wanted to be the first to put them in words. After waiting an hour and having convinced themselves that no more would come, they resumed the march. Ere they passed below Viewfield, the glad news passed from man to man that the wife of Harry Macdonald, the brother of the factor and a successful indigo-planter home from India, had given birth to a daughter that morning. So they halted below the house and Padruig Macdonald made a little speech: "Men," said Padruig, "this is news of good omen; for the child born this morning is the great-grandchild of an Dotair Ban, the best Skyeman who ever was born. And I propose that we give a cheer in honour of the child and in welcome to this recruit to our Island. Now then . . ."

Padruig led off, and the cheer went echoing from hill to hill. The young mother heard it and her heart stood still for fear. Was not her husband the factor's brother? Were not these who raised such a shout the Braes law-breakers? In great alarm she asked the nurse to bring her husband. And when he came he laughed at her fears. "For," said he, "these decent and kind men have raised a cheer in honour of the baby and her great-grandfather, an Dotair Ban."

At the crossroads they halted and sent a scout along the Uig road to report. In a short time he returned and told them that there was nobody coming to help on the road from Sluggans, Drumuie, or Wood-end. A drizzle of rain began to fall. No recruit was forthcoming from the little town. Not even a policeman was visible. There is nothing like the chill of a cold rain to damp ardour. It was then that Murdo the Bard put the feelings of their hearts into words.

"Men of the Braes," said he, taking up a stance in front of them, "you have done all that honour demands of you. Today you have struck a blow for liberty the fame of which will resound throughout the world. You have driven a nail into the coffin of the tyrants. They have driven our people in droves, like cattle out of their homes, across the seas to live or die as might be, without means, to toil like slaves for food. But they will not drive us: for what we did this day will hurl the oppressors from their seats.

"But it is not expected of any that they should do the impossible. Our enemies have weapons of warfare; we haven't a single gun. You cannot fight bayonets with your fists. For the moment the minions of the law have the power on their side; but they will not have the power for long. The Queen, who loves our people, will see that justice works out protection for the oppressed, and deliverance for the needy. The forces against us are too strong today, but tomorrow . . ."

At that moment there came the sound of the bagpipes playing the "Men of Harlech." The words of the orator died on his lips. The crowd turned eager eyes towards the road from the town. And round the curve there came the piper with his kilt swinging and ribbons flying from the drones. At the head of the red-coated Volunteers marched Lieutenant Ross, looking neither to right nor left. The Volunteers cast sideway glances at the motley crowd of the Braes men, but no word was uttered as they swung past and marched along the Sligachan road. The wild notes of the bagpipes came fainter and fainter. Heard so, in the falling dusk, echoed from the hills, the skirl of the pipes stirs the blood. Incredible as it may sound to modern ears, the ban of the Presbyterian Elders, all-powerful then, had banished bagpipes from the Braes. It was the unexpectedness of that ancestral music falling on ears long deprived of the strains that finally demoralised the would-be rebels. Their enemy had everything: guns, bayonets, swords, and the martial music of the pipes. What could they do against that?

"Men of the Braes," began Murdo, resuming a speech begun in one world and ending in another, "it is no use our going on. You cannot fight bullets with chuckie-stones. We can leave our comrades now in prison to the justice of the nation, whose conscience is at last being stabbed awake. As for me, I am returning at once to Gedintailor."

"And I to Balmeanach," exclaimed Padruig.

And these two set out southward along the road to Peinmore and Braes.

There are times when men are like sheep, and this was such a time. Every man followed without a word. In five minutes the crossroads were empty. The clouds which were threatening all evening suddenly broke, and runnels of water gurgled on the roads. And the Braes men, now broken into little detachments, leaned slightly to the right, trying to protect their necks from the wind-driven rain.

That was how I awoke in the night and heard the monotonous tramp, tramp, passing along the road behind the schoolhouse.

## § 6

SAM, however, did not return home, for he had an aunt married to a crofter in Sluggans and he had told his mother that he would stay with her for the night. So there was no anxiety on that score. At the crossroads Sam heard Murdo's speech with bitterness of heart. No boy was ever more disappointed. He made his way to Sluggans. Before supper, he remembered that nine o'clock was the hour fixed

for the great assault on the prison door. He slipped out, and the stars were shining through a cloud-wrack. There was an interval between showers. A sudden thought came to him that the men of Portree might retrieve the base retreat of the Braes men. So he set out and ran the quarter-mile without a stop.

And this was how he told me what he saw.

"Thormoid, a charaid," said he, "it was the greatest disappointment of my life. Though I live to a hundred, I shall never be so wounded in my heart. I ran all the way to Skene's Bank, and there I slowed down to a walk. For I wanted to join the Portree warriors with some dignity as they marshalled their ranks for storming the jail. But to my sorrow Somerled Square was empty. I heard a clock striking nine—the very hour fixed for the great assault. I walked to the prison gate, and there I found that two men had assembled."

"Who were they, Sam?" I asked eagerly.

"Kemp the tailor, and Bain the painter," replied Sam with all the sorrow of the world in his voice.

"They were heroes, these two," I exclaimed.

"Heroes!" exclaimed Sam. "I shall never get over it. The old saying has it that it takes nine tailors to make a man, but there will be a new proverb after this."

"What will it be?" I asked.

"Why, this, of course," answered Sam. "It takes nine Braes men to make a tailor."

## II

### A BATTLE OF THE LORD

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#### § 1

IT WOULD BE A WEARINESS to record here in detail what happened to the six prisoners. The curious can find a detailed record in Mackenzie's collection of documents—an invaluable compendium. Suffice it to say that they were received at Inverness by a cheering crowd; that bail was forthcoming immediately; that they returned to the Braes as heroes; that later, at their trial in Inverness, they were fined the smallest possible sums, and that these fines were paid by the Inverness Liberals, and that they bore with modest satisfaction all their days the glory of having been in prison for the cause of human deliverance from oppression.

#### § 2

SITTING here at a window from which I can see the foothills of Ben Lee and Glamaig and Ben Dianaveg, the Battle of the Braes, as I look back across sixty-two years, stands forth as a landmark in social progress. There were no firearms, no claymores, not even bows and arrows; there was blood spilt but nobody was killed; it was the surging of a disorderly and leaderless crowd that rushed hither and thither throwing stones and clods; it was a primitive fight between a mob lacking leadership and a disciplined force. And inevitably discipline won. But it wasn't Sheriff Ivory and his policy of naked force that came off victorious. It gained the day but lost the centuries. For the slumbering conscience of man suddenly awoke as from a nightmare.

There was no war then, and no battles anywhere wherewith to fill the newspapers. The fighting instinct in man glories in battles. And naturally the newspapers, not having a real battle to report, served up an ersatz battle. The front pages of every newspaper featured the Battle of the Braes. Newspaper reporters flocked to the Island. There had been no battle on British soil since Culloden in 1746: how exciting to have a battle in 1882 after an interval of 136 years. In Windsor

Castle the Queen, who was acquiring in the popular imagination a semi-divine status, wrote her Prime Minister a letter. No doubt she was deeply moved by the sufferings of her beloved Highlanders. In London, William Ewart Gladstone reading his *Times* exclaimed: "What on earth is this? A battle in the Isle of Skye." He glanced at the *Daily News*, and there it was again: "The Battle of the Braes." Gladstone asked to be supplied with all the facts, and then he read for the first time of Strathnaver filled with smoke from end to end as 300 dwellings were consumed by fire and faggot; of Glenorchy made a wilderness and a thousand clansmen thrown homeless and destitute into slums or driven into exile. As he read he said again and again: "This must end."

Questions rained on the Government in the House of Commons; the upholders of the Rights of Man everywhere lifted up their voice. Newspapers and publicists in France proclaimed their fiery indignation. Here was the real John Bull, the champion of freedom and justice at the ends of the earth, trampling at home on the rights and freedom of the men who fought his battles. What arrant hypocrisy! If anyone doubted John Bull's double dealing, here was incontestable proof. That was what stabbed the national conscience deepest. The nation could not lie down under that charge. The usual steps were taken: a Royal Commission and deliverance following.

In the schoolbook which then provided reading for my school class there was a poem of Southey's called "The Battle of Blenheim." It is odd what sticks in the memory. I learned it then by heart, and sitting here I recall little Peterkin's questioning Kaspar his old grandfather, after picking up something, large and smooth and round, and the old man's reply:

"Tis some poor fellow's skull," said he,  
"Who fell in the great victory."

They say it was a shocking sight  
After the field was won;  
For many thousand bodies here  
Lay rotting in the sun.  
But things like that, you know, must be  
After a famous victory.

And everybody praised the Duke,  
Who this great fight did win."  
"But what good came of it at last?"

Quoth little Peterkin.  
"Why, that I cannot tell," said he,  
"But 'twas a famous victory."

The victory, to all appearance, lay with the Sheriff and his blue-coated men at that battle in the Cumhag. But the fruits of victory lay with those who there put up a fight for the Rights of Man. No anglicised duchess could any more, by the hands of alien agents, make a county waste by faggot and fire; no marquess could drive a thousand clansmen into slums; no factor could again by a stroke of the pen deprive the workers of the soil of the grazings which made their toil fruitful; no man who built a house would tremble at the frown of a ground-officer, with fear of losing it. Solon, when he was asked why he did not enact a law against parricide, replied that he would not even suggest the possibility of such a crime. When, after the Battle of Culloiden, the Government in London turned the Chiefs into landlords, the clansmen were left unprotected by law because nobody would even suggest the possibility of the Chief despoiling and beggaring his own kindred—the very people who raised him to power. The conscience of the nation, stung by the ribald laughter of the world as it mocked the hypocrisy that supported the fight for liberty from China to Peru while it permitted thousands of its own people to be destroyed by ruthless tyranny, decreed at last that, before man's inalienable rights, the rights of property must yield.

## § 3

It is only when surveyed from a distance in time that we can discover the truth. Here, looking out on the little town (seeing it possesses a court-house and a jail and is the capital of an island as large as Rutland, it merits the designation town) into which the Sheriff, sixty-two years ago, marched his prisoners amid the execration of the people, I began to question myself, like little Peterkin: What was the strife about? H. G. Wells would answer: "The Rights of Man." That at once raises the further question: "What is Man?" Our intellectuals for a generation or more have been persistently proclaiming that man is merely a "fortuitous concourse of atoms" that have accidentally arranged themselves in that particular shape: walking on two feet instead of four. If so, there can be no such thing as the Rights of Man. For insensate elements such as atoms and molecules can have no rights.

What do these Rights of Man rest upon as their foundation? They rest on the law of Justice: that every man has an equal right to security in the enjoyment of the fruit of his labour and of his possessions. But where did that law originate? Could it have originated from a "fortuitous concourse of atoms"? Did man, himself an accident



of accidents, discover it accidentally? That is more than unlikely: it is unthinkable. No highbrow has as yet claimed that the moral law was discovered in a laboratory.

The source of Justice is to be found not inside man but outside him. "The Moral Law," said Blackstone, the greatest of lawyers, "is co-eval with mankind and was dictated by God Himself. . . . It is binding over all the globe, in all countries and at all times." Can it, then, be the case that the religion, which has proclaimed this truth for centuries, is right and the intellectuals wrong? There is nothing to amaze us in that. For when the day is in conflict with the centuries, it is safe to assume that the centuries are right. Where, then, are we to look for the source of Justice, the foundation of the Rights of Man? The mind of man can think of no other name for that source save God. How noble the word, how awesome and yet how lovable: but our highbrows prefer the term "Life-force" and they avoid mentioning His Name by speaking of "Imponderables." If, then, the source of Justice be outside man, "The Rights of Man" is meaningless. The true slogan should be "The Rights of God in Man," or, briefly, "The Rights of God."

That struggle in the Braes, if we thus view it in the light of Eternity, was not a fight of the dispossessed for their rights, it was a battle of the Lord. Over it the trumpets of heaven rang out Victory, Victory. "Facts," said Bacon, "are the voice of God revealed in things." There, in that narrow pass on the brink of a precipice in the Braes, the voice of God rang out proclaiming that Justice must henceforth reign. "Without Justice," said Augustine, "the nations of the world are only highway robbers." Without Justice, as the records prove, duchesses, marquesses, and lords are but robbers. In the Highlands of Scotland God's law of Justice between man and man before the law was re-established. That narrow pass between the hill and the sea is in very truth holy ground. It is only when we learn to look not at the things seen but at the things not seen, that the true meaning of the conflicts of life reveals itself. For veiled behind the seen is God, the invisible, working out His will.

## § 4

As I sit here at the window, the whole sky is gradually suffused with radiance, and I watch streamers of clouds edged with orange and purple flying hither and thither, while over Ben Lee there spreads a great cloth of gold. No wonder the exiles, driven from a land such as this, were broken-hearted. And, with a beat of the heart, I remember that there will be no more refugees at the nod of an underling. That

was the fruit wherewith the Battle of the Braes enriched the people. What a contrast it presents to real war. In the year 1917 I stood on the Butte of Warlencourt, and, far as eye could see, little white wooden crosses gleamed among flaming poppies, and the inscription borne by many was this: "Here lies an unknown British soldier." Yes, unknown to those who laid him in the shallow grave, dug in haste, but known to those who loved him and to God to whom he was most dear. That was the year of the Battle of the Somme, when day after day the best and noblest of our race, in wave after wave, were hurled into the consuming furnace. At the price of blood beyond all telling, victory came at last and we were masters of the world's destiny. But what good came of it? This, that we were free: but we turned the freedom into licence: a licence to race to ruin, on a road of our own choosing, and at a pace of our own setting. We were to hold the greatest of empires but there was to be no more sacrifice for us. The race to ruin became so rapid that we became incapable of perceiving the shame of our acts. At last we reached bottom: our Prime Minister and Foreign Secretary toasted Victor Emmanuel in Rome as Emperor of Abyssinia while Haile Selassie, the Emperor of Abyssinia, whom we were pledged to succour and protect by many treaties, was an exile in our land. I have never come across in history any episode more shameful. And yet there was no protest from Church or from State.<sup>1</sup> So low had we fallen that we were unconscious of our degradation. And then the sword of the divine Judgment flamed over us once more. The river of blood flowing round the world today makes the Somme appear a mere trickle. Over three continents are the broken bodies of the young; over all the world are the broken hearts of the old.

How different the result of the so-called Battle of the Braes. It brought freedom from fear and freedom from want to the survivors of a great race. It ensured that the man who built a house would himself inhabit it. It procured a Magna Carta for the inhabitants of the Isles of the Sea and of that wide district from the Mull of Kintyre to John o' Groats. Henceforth that wide-scattered people could dwell each under the shadow of his own vine and fig-tree none making them afraid. It vindicated the justice of Almighty God. For the power of God is manifested in this: that He wins His greatest victories by the feeblest of weapons.

And Saul armed David with his armour . . . also he armed him with a coat of mail. . . . And David put them off him. And he took his staff in his hand, and chose him five smooth stones out of the

<sup>1</sup> I was wrong; for Mr. Lloyd George (now an Earl) voiced his indignation.

brook . . . and his sling was in his hand: and he drew near to the Philistine. . . . And the Philistine said unto David, "Am I a dog, that thou comest to me with staves?" And the Philistine cursed David by his gods. . . . And it came to pass, when the Philistine arose, and came and drew nigh to meet David, that David hasted, and ran toward the army, to meet the Philistine. And David put his hand in his bag, and took thence a stone, and slang it, and smote the Philistine in his forehead . . . and he fell upon his face to the earth. So David prevailed over the Philistine with a sling and with a stone, and smote the Philistine and slew him.

It is always so. With the feeblest of weapons the greatest victories are ever won. By handfuls of peasants, praying behind dykes, God won freedom for His Church. John Brown, determined that his country should be the home of free men, attacked Harper's Ferry, was defeated and hanged: but John Brown's soul goes marching on. Carey, a cobbler, triumphs over Goliath, and opens up a way for the Crucified into the heart of India. God can transform mud into steel. No instrument is too weak for Him. It is in line with all history that, with stones and clods as their only weapons, the men, women, and children of the Braes should have prevailed over the Philistines.

## THE ANCIENT LOYALTIES

## § I

ONE LAST VISITOR to the school at Braes I can recall with the utmost clarity though sixty years and more have passed since. It was the summer of that same year, and the people, busy with their crops, had settled down into a condition of torpid expectancy. I cannot fix the date beyond saying that it was in Sam's and my own last weeks in the school; for Sam was going in a couple of weeks to act as odd-jobs boy in a Portree hotel and I to Inverness to a secondary school. Sam did not stay long in the hotel, for *Robinson Crusoe* and the South Sea Isles had cast an irresistible spell on him, and he went to sea whenever his stature permitted; but I, to my loss, went on to the bitter end with the arid life of school. Sam determined to taste life's experiences to the full, and I merely to read about life. Sam chose the better part and I the duller and safer. But a partnership of five years, only to be revived for two days thirty-five years later, was coming to an end when the most beautiful woman we ever saw walked into the school. Sam expressed his emotion by a sibilant intake of his breath, and I gazed with wide-open eyes.

There were two ladies really, but only the smaller of the two captured the eyes. She was perfect in size and form. There was a flash in her eyes which brightened the dingy schoolroom. The taller and older of the two visitors was Lady Middleton, and the other was Louisa, Lady Macdonald of the Isles.

It was only afterwards that we understood why Lady Macdonald came and paid us that informal visit. A Glasgow newspaper had inserted at the end of the usual weekly summary of Land League activities in the North a supplementary paragraph to the effect that no landlord dared now show his face in the disturbed areas—such was the temper of the people. When Lady Macdonald read that she was still for a minute and then said to her cousin, "Let us walk through Braes and ferry to Sconser." "That," responded her cousin, after reading the paragraph, "is the thing to do." Lady Macdonald's determination

to prove to a Glasgow journalist that the ancient loyalties were far stronger than Irish agitators brought herself and her cousin to the school on that day. The impression made on Sam and me was exceeded by that made on my father. Out of the forbidding and dour Calvinism which found a secret pleasure in the thought that his kindred and neighbours were foreordained to be roasted for all eternity in a cauldron of fire and brimstone, there suddenly emerged a man radiating welcome at every pore. In that smiling countenance there wasn't a trace left of the gloom that regarded life as the antechamber of endless torment. Sam could not take his eyes off Lady Macdonald, and I could not take my eyes off my father. I was so surprised at his sudden transformation into a courtier.

And he made a little speech of welcome which has been a pleasant memory, for it revealed that, after all, his gloom was the fruit of frustration. He had set out to study for the Church, but, like many another, married ere he achieved his purpose and so never achieved it. All his ambitions withered and contracted to the size of this bare and forbidding schoolroom.

"Children," said my father, introducing the visitors, "we are today greatly honoured by the presence of Lady Macdonald and Lady Middleton. In the years to come you will realise what a great debt our Island owes to the family of the Chiefs of the Clan Donald. Sir James Macdonald founded the town of Portree, with its court-house and jail, and so established law and order on an enduring basis. Lady Margaret Macdonald, his mother, saved the life of Prince Charlie by shielding him from the Red-coats. It is written that Lady Margaret was so much beloved that the people would run before her carriage to remove the stones from the road. The mother of the present Lord Macdonald was Queen Victoria's favourite Lady-in-Waiting, and that was a great honour to our Island. And Lady Macdonald can be assured that she also is beloved by the Islanders for her kindness, her love for the poor and needy, and for her courage in adversity. To show your welcome, let us give a loud cheer."

And Sam was the first who sprang to his feet and led the cheering. When it looked like fading away, Sam would begin again louder than before. The three traditional cheers were rendered in grand style.

And Lady Macdonald stood up and thanked us.

"Children," she said, "I am very glad to be here and to see you all so well and so happy. The deepest wish of my heart is that the children of our Island—when I say 'our' I mean yours and mine—should be happy in their youth and prosper in their lives. Our Island has the kindest and most lovable people in the world. Thank you very

much." And having so spoken, she flashed a smile round the room. My father with all the graces of a Cavalier escorted the ladies to the road.

Sam let his breath whistle through his teeth—half sigh and half exclamation point.

"Thormoid," he whispered as my father returned to his desk, "Thormoid, I am not going to be a land-leaguer any more."

## § 2

Now that the old world of 1882 has vanished beyond recall, reduced to debris by the megalomania of an Austrian house-painter, submerged by the beneficent autocracy of officialdom, it is well-nigh impossible to make the present generation realise what their grand-fathers felt of loyalty and affection for the family of Lord Macdonald. The history of the Isles for a thousand years is mostly the history of the Clan Donald. The Lord of the Isles was a mighty prince who made treaties with foreign potentates as an equal. It never crossed the minds of the people I knew sixty years ago that there could be any other claimant to the honour. Of course, the Chief of the Clan Donald, like the King, could do no wrong. If mistakes were made, such as depriving them of Ben Lee in 1865, Lord Macdonald was not to blame. For Somerled, Lord Macdonald, was a minor aged twelve years, and all the power was vested in the factor of the day, who wasn't even a member of the clan. When Lady Macdonald, with a smile, made Sam and myself captive as we sat at the rude desk in that so primitive a school, we knew that neither she nor her husband was responsible for all the trouble about Ben Lee. "Fear a Choire" was the origin of the trouble. During all the troubles the hearts of the Islanders were still, as of old, loyal to their Chief.

As the feather can show the way the wind blows, so little things still went on revealing the ancient feelings. The crofters themselves had little to boast of in life, but that little sufficed. When the fishing was good and potatoes plentiful, all was well. They had cows that gave milk and butter and curds, and sheep that gave wool and mutton. No, there was nothing to complain of much, compared to Cowcaddens and the South Side of Glasgow. Doubtless their place was obscure in the social scale, but were they not represented in the great world by their Chief? When Lord Macdonald's steam-yacht, *The Lady of the Isles*, came through the Sound of Raasay we watched her with pride as if she were our own. Ian Ban, who served in her for two seasons, would tell again his oft-told tale how when *The Lady of the Isles* lay at anchor in

the harbour of Marseilles a French sea-captain said to him that she had the most beautiful lines of any ship that he had ever seen in the South of France, and he had seen many. As Ian Ban spoke Gaelic and a very few English words, and the French captain presumably spoke French, it is a puzzle how that conversation took place. Yet we never thought of doubting Ian Ban's veracity, for, as Murdo the Bard said so aptly, "No doubt the French captain spoke as much English as Ian Ban did, and they would thus converse amiably if restrictedly." And as we watched the yacht with swelling pride, Ian Ban would go on to tell us how her captain, his own second cousin on his mother's side, told him that the bills for the cruise in the Mediterranean came to over £500 a month. That, of course, we dismissed as utterly incredible, not knowing that a yacht such as *The Lady of the Isles* was the most costly of all luxuries. But, nevertheless, when Ian Ban told his tales we expanded and glowed with self-complacency. We felt as if we ourselves were cutting a figure in the world. And when Ian Ban described the dinner given by Lord Macdonald at Gibraltar to the officers of the Cameron Highlanders, and the wonderful wines of the country that then were quaffed, we felt as if we too were partaking of royal banquets.

In these golden days when Lord Macdonald brought his family from London to Skye, he always came all the way by special train with his whole retinue of servants. At Stromeferry (then the railway terminus) *The Lady of the Isles* lay at the pier, and soon the luggage was piled on board and the great company gathered on deck and the yacht sailed proudly through the Kyles to Armadale Castle. To the Islanders it was a yearly feast of wonder. They marvelled at their own resources that thus enabled their Chief to journey through all the lands of the Sassenachs in a special train, independent of time-tables, and finish in his own steam-yacht. And when Raasay was sold to a coal-magnate who came with a steam-yacht larger and faster than *The Lady of the Isles* you could hear Ian Ban on any summer evening as he watched the *Rona* pass along the Sound explain to a group of happy listeners that for beauty of line she was not a patch on *The Lady of the Isles*. And we heard once more what the captain said at Marseilles!

## § 3

I ONLY saw Lady Macdonald twice in my life. The first time was when she visited the school as I have told, and converted Sam from a red-hot land-leaguer into a Cavalier; the second time was in Edinburgh forty years later, when, after an operation for cataract, she asked me to come and see her. There she was, sitting solitary by the fire with her

eyes bandaged, a frail old woman, still with traces of the beauty that charmed the heart so long before. She was poor now, for the world had changed. Did she not deserve to be poor after all that luxury in her youth? No, she didn't; for the extravagances were not of her seeking. She found *The Lady of the Isles* as part of the patrimony that came to her husband; and how was she to know that the good days would end so soon? Who could foresee the revenue of estates swallowed up by ever-increasing taxes and rates? She did not build the castle of forty rooms; nor lay out gardens and grounds that needed, eight gardeners! How was she to know that the wealth of the nation would be consumed in the smoke of guns and shells? She was the victim of circumstances beyond her control. But when she spoke there was still the soft, lovely voice that expressed an indomitable will. . . .

You will always find that when illness comes people speak of themselves with the frankness and simplicity of children. She spoke very gently of her husband, a hopeless and helpless invalid for over thirty years;<sup>1</sup> of Archibald, the most gifted of her sons, who would have added to the honour of the family, and who was killed in the Boer War; of her two sons who had died in the Great War, and how she now had no son. "I do not complain of that," said she, "for I would not have my family shelter behind other mothers' sons." And incidentally she mentioned that no shootings or fishings were let now for four years, and that taxation had taken all the revenue. Servants' pensions had to be paid nevertheless, and would continue to be paid.

Long gone were the days when *The Lady of the Isles* waited at the wooden pier of Stromeferry for the special train coming along the curved shores of Lochcarron; the days of horses and chariots and of Armadale Castle full of guests; gone the joyous days at Cowes and the evenings at the Royal Yacht Club and dinners with the Prince of Wales; gone her gallant sons, leaving her house empty and desolate. There she sat with bandaged eyes, bent but with her will unbroken, facing the future with unabated courage. As the shadows gathered round her and she looked back on the riches and poverty of life, on its successes and failures, they seemed to her alike—mere impostors. With her the feudal age ended in our Island. She was in very truth *ultima Romanorum*.

<sup>1</sup> Now for over fifty years.



## THE PROPHET FROM SAN FRANCISCO

## § I

IN THE MONTHS that followed the so-called Battle of the Braes our townships along the rocky shore of the Sound of Raasay found themselves the centre of world interest. Whatever they did became front-page news. Instead of living in a backwater they found themselves borne by a torrent to the Utopia they dreamed of. Visitors from the great world came all through the summer, full of curiosity. Their very appearance was a source of amazement. Long-haired men and short-haired women were not yet a common spectacle in the Island, and the more they multiplied on the roads the more the wonder grew. One of these explained to Murdo the Bard that he wore his hair long because he was a poet. "A poet, you know, is known in Wales and in the Highlands as a bard."

"I always thought that the beautiful poems came from the brain," replied Murdo, "and it is news to me that they come from the hair. The Good Book tells that Samson's strength lay in his long hair, and if that was so, it is quite as believable that the hair should be the source of lovely rhymes. But what will happen when the poet becomes bald?"

The long-haired poet gazed at Murdo with amazement. "The long hair is just a sign to the world that a poet is not as other men: that he is an artist and feels more and sees more than others."

"Oh, I see," exclaimed Murdo. "A poet can have his hair cut off by Delilah and he would lose nothing; he would be a poet still."

The long-haired poet agreed. "Do tell me," said he, "who was Samson and how did Delilah cut off his hair? There must be a story in that!"

But Murdo, there and then, ended the conversation. For, as he afterwards explained, a man with long hair who claimed to be a bard but was so ignorant as not to know the lovely stories in the Holy Book could not be worth talking to: he must be an impostor. "I am a bard myself," Murdo concluded his tale, "and I know what I am talking about. The hair and poetry have nothing to do with each other. My

father was bald as an egg in his old age, and he was a bard to the last."

When in the late autumn the Prophet of San Francisco arrived to confer with the oppressed in our Island it was at once noticed that his fair curly hair was low down over his coat collar. "He must be a poet," said Murdo to Ian Ban, "and no doubt he draws his inspiration from his locks."

## § 2

WHEN word was passed through the townships that a great man, called by his friends the "Prophet of San Francisco," was to address a meeting in the school, the whole manhood of the countryside assembled to hear him. For the very word America cast a spell. Had not hundreds of the Islanders gone thither in search of the Promised Land? Might not the visitor bring news of the exiles? And they had a great desire to know what their kindred beyond the sea thought of their exploits. Did they regard the folk still left in the Island as heroes or as rebels?

If I knew the name of the chairman at the meeting, I have now forgotten it. But I rather think I never knew it. He was a stranger, an agent of the Land League, which operated from Glasgow, and the only thing I remember is that he spoke Gaelic perfectly. He wanted the land for the people, but he wanted more than the land. Butter without bread was no food for a man, and land without stock was valueless. The crofters must get not only the land but sufficient money to stock the land. At that the bard nodded and smiled at Ian Ban, and a loud cheer acclaimed the advent of the golden age. Then the chairman introduced Henry George, the Prophet of San Francisco.

Across the gulf of more than sixty years I can still see Henry George as he was then. His appearance was not, at the first sight, very impressive. He was a short, thick-set man, and bald on the top of his head. Curling red hair fell on his collar and a red beard wagged as he spoke. A large bulging forehead rose like a dome above the red beard. His attire was far removed from a dandy's! But when he got animated and the words rushed like a torrent and his blue eyes flashed with fire, he radiated vitality and power. He then looked what he was—a prophet heralding a new day.

He lost no time in getting into touch with his audience. When he read in San Francisco of the sufferings of the people in the Highlands of Scotland, and an account of the Battle of the Braes, he resolved to come and see for himself. For whenever he read of the sorrow of the poor, and of their ill-treatment, his heart was set afire. He knew

the miseries of the poor, for he had been poor himself. When his first child was born they had no money to buy food for the mother:

"I walked about the street and made up my mind to ask help from the first man whose appearance indicated that he had money. I stopped a stranger and told him I wanted five dollars. He asked what for. I told him for my new-born child and the mother, and that I had no food for them. He gave me the money. Since then I have been passing on these five dollars."

And then he told how there came to him, like a sudden revelation from heaven, the truth that in the private ownership of land lay the root of all the evils that harassed the world. And how he wrote a book that would change the course of history. That book, *Progress and Poverty*, was the great offering which he laid on the altar of God—the Creator of heaven and earth, whose the world is, and who giveth the use of it to His children in equal proportions.

"When I had finished the last page, in the dead of night, when I was writing alone, I flung myself on my knees and prayed. I wept like a child. I put it in the Master's hand for Him to use."

He then depicted how man was deprived of his birthright. In the Hebrides he had seen the poor dwelling in hovels which a savage in Africa would scorn to live in. In the cities the poor were packed like herring in a barrel, deprived of air and of sunshine and of starlight. The land in the town could not be bought without a price that would cover it with gold. That value was created by the labour of the people: and the values which they themselves had created were turned against them so that they could not buy land on which to build a house. "That injustice cries to high heaven," said he. In glowing words he depicted how the mighty Roman Empire fell at last because the peasants lost their land, and the cities sucked the country dry, and oppression and injustice broke the spirit of the poor. The other day I came across an illustration he used, and I remembered the flash in his eye. Here it is:

A historian of the fifth century, visiting the camp of Attila as an ambassador from Theodosius, was greeted in Greek by a man dressed as a Hun. It turned out that the stranger was a Roman citizen who had been captured in one of the raids into the Eastern empire. He had taken service with his captors, risen to high command, and had been given land and a Tartar wife. He declared that his life as a free Barbarian was vastly superior to his life as a Roman citizen, exposed to perpetual demands for taxes. The ambassador tried to shame the renegade by talking of the majesty and equity of Roman Law, but was told that, however perfect in

theory Roman Law might be, as actually administered by venal officials it afforded little or no protection to the poor, and had become a mere engine of oppression.

At that every eye gleamed. They knew how low the law of Scotland and England could descend. Were they not dragged to prison, man-handled, and fined, for claiming their own!

To these men of an alien tongue Henry George had spoken as if they were a great assembly of the world's intelligentsia. He became oblivious of the shabby unswept schoolroom, of the many lined faces that showed but little response. He did not notice the lack of cheers, for, that being also their place of worship, they thought it irreverent to cheer much. But his face shone transfigured, and his hands gesticulated ceaselessly, for he saw humanity climbing up the dolorous way and the burden on the backs of the oppressed growing ever heavier.

The chairman invited questions. The Elder, who sat under the desk and listened with closed eyes, asked in his stilted English whether it was a Christian policy to rob one man that another might be enriched. A new spark gleamed in the eyes of Henry George. He rose at once.

"My friend here suggests that it is not Christian to take from one man for the benefit of another. That is being lawfully done every day. The State levies taxes on the rich that paupers may be supported; that armies may be fed and clothed; that sailors in ships of war may be ready to fight. The State takes from one and gives to the other. When the good of the greater number requires it so, it is perfectly right. But it is much better when men give without any compulsion, holding the good things of life in common."

"We read in the Holy Book," said the Elder, "that the early Christians had all things in common; but it was a failure. They all became paupers."

"But why was it a failure?" exclaimed Henry George, his eyes kindling. "It was a failure because of the unchristian acts of St. Peter. It was only what any canny Scot might have done, when Ananias kept back a little against a rainy day. But Peter acted as Jesus Christ never would have acted. His judgment was unmingled with mercy. He forgot that there is forgiveness with God for the penitent. What he should have said was somewhat like this: 'Ananias, you have told a falsehood; but God's mercy is infinite. I know how great that mercy is. For three times I told a falsehood and denied my Lord and I was forgiven. My Master said to me afterwards, "Feed my sheep," to me who had denied Him. Repent, Ananias, and the same mercy will be yours.' But instead of that his words were as a sword: 'Thou hast

not lied unto men, but unto God,' and Ananias fell dead. No experiment could survive that! Peter killed the first attempt at Socialism."

The face of the Elder grew darker and darker as he listened. Measured by the standard of Christ, Henry George saw how far short Peter had come. But the Elder only saw before him a man who dared to tamper with the Holy Book, giving an interpretation all his own, and condemning a holy apostle for a righteous judgment. And rising to his full height he turned round and faced the audience.

"Men of the Braes," he said in his native language, "you have heard how the speaker from America has touched with rude, unconsecrated hands the Ark of the Covenant—the Holy Book. He would have us believe that he is a wiser and a better man than the holy apostle Peter. I can't believe that. The man who has spoken to us is evidently self-deceived, a perverter of the Scriptures and devoid of right principles. The Holy Book says, 'Come out from among them and be ye separate.' And I am going to do just that. I am going straight home, and I advise you all to follow my example."

And the Elder grasped his staff, and looking neither to right nor left walked to the door. At the door he turned and waved his hand, summoning the rest to follow. One by one they rose and passed out. In a minute or two, Henry George and the chairman were left looking at each other.

"I never had an experience quite like this," said the Prophet.

The chairman was silent for a few seconds, and then his face broke into a broad smile.

"It is that fatal word Principles that did it," said he; "I knew when I heard the word that mischief would follow."

"What is the meaning of Principles?" asked Henry George.

"That would need a long time to explain. But, roughly, all that is required is to call your ignorant prejudices Principles and you are at once justified in breaking up the Church or insulting a guest."

"That," replied the American, "is a convenient and useful word."

### § 3

ON his way home Alasdair MacChallum came in to see my mother. The meeting was held in the other school (a quarter of a mile from ours), and my father had not attended. So Alasdair told them what had happened, and how the lecturer was left like a lone pelican in the wilderness.

"The Islanders were once famous for their good manners," remarked my mother, "but that day is over."

"When I was a student," commented my father, "I heard a great preacher preaching on the text 'The fool has said in his heart, There is no God,' and I still remember his saying that there were two kinds of fools: the fool that said 'there is no God' and the fool that said 'there is no God but for me.' And the latter was the worse of the two."

"How is that?" asked Alasdair.

"Because the self-righteousness that could claim a monopoly in God shuts and bars the door against the Holy Spirit. The man, who is so self-satisfied as that, needs nothing and receives nothing."

"That explains the Elder," said Alasdair. "He thinks that God has no place for any but for folk as narrow as himself."

Then Alasdair told a story that had in it a sense of his dissatisfaction with the changed times.

"You remember," he said, turning to my mother, "the story of Lord Macdonald, in the old days, searching for a cure for his despondency."

"No," she replied, "I have heard many stories of the Lords of the Isles, but not that one."

"Oh, well," said Alasdair, "I shall just tell you that before I go.

"Many, many years ago the Morair of the day fell ill with an illness more of the spirit than of the body. Everything was wrong—even the stags in his forest and the salmon in his rivers. Nothing was of interest; nothing gave him pleasure. He consulted a wise man (in those days there were wise men), and the wise old man told him that there was only one cure for him: he must search until he find a man who was perfectly happy all his days, and when such a man was found, the Morair would borrow his shirt and sleep in it one night. On the morrow he would be cured.

"So the Lord Macdonald of the day set out on his search. His estates were then big as a principality. He went through Sleat but found nobody who had been perfectly happy all his days. Strath yielded some happy men, but nobody whose days were all perfectly cloudless. It was the same with Kiltaraglen and with Snizort and Kilmuir. Then he crossed to Uist, until at last he came to Paible, and there he found what he searched for—a man who had been perfectly happy all his life.

"Are you sure you have been happy all your days?" asked the Morair.

"Yes, a Mhorair," answered the old man, 'my life has been without a sorrow.'

"Even when your parents and friends died?"

"They, in death, passed into Paradise to an endless summer of

bliss. Only a fool would be sorry when they became God's kings and priests.'

"'Had you no losses to sadden you?'

"'Losses of earthly things: they were as nothing compared to the eternal inheritance, which makes me richer than an emperor.'

"'Then,' said the Morair, 'you are the very man I have been looking for. Lend me your shirt that I may sleep in it tonight, and tomorrow I shall return it to you.'

"The old man—Hamish MacCodrum by name—opened his jacket wide.

"'See, my Lord,' said he, 'I have never worn a shirt.'"

There was a moment's silence when Alasdair ended his tale.

"That story is beautiful, better than a sermon," said my mother.

"That is what is wrong with the world," said my father, "they think that happiness lies in material possessions. Alexander the Great had the whole world to gratify his appetite, but he straightway found himself dissatisfied and longed for another."

"That's it, Master," concluded Alasdair; "the whole world couldn't satisfy one longing heart. And we have filled the Island with turmoil thinking that if we got Ben Lee we would be happy. The man who lives long will see what will come of it all. The Prophet from San Francisco would divide the earth equally among the people. It would only last one day. For on the morrow they would be unequal again. For some men are wise and some are foolish. He would first require to make all men equal in their ability. And that he cannot do."

And having thus given voice to his faith and doubts, Alasdair gripped his stick and set out for Balmeanach.

## THE SWORD OF HONOUR

## § I

WHEN THE SIX BRAES PRISONERS were let off with fines which their sympathisers paid for them, and had returned home in great triumph, Sheriff Ivory was much displeased. The mountains were in labour and produced a ridiculous mouse. How could law and order be vindicated if the Queen's Writ did not run? He applied to Glasgow for further police assistance; but the police who had been lent reported such demonstrations of booing and ribald mocking at every port on their way back that the great Corporation refused to give any more aid. Even the capital of the County, Inverness itself, refused to lend police to its Sheriff. To the Sheriff such short-sighted policy on the part of the Capital of the Highlands was little short of treason towards Her Majesty. These bat-eyed magistrates would end by bringing ruin on themselves. If this lawlessness spread, the Islanders might well march on Inverness itself, loot and burn it as their ancestors did in 1411. There was nobody left who saw clearly the peril that confronted the country save himself. So he started a new policy. He got the Court of Session to interdict the crofters from grazing cattle on the lands they claimed and of which they had been deprived. For not obeying the interdict John Macpherson, Glendale, and a few others had to go to Edinburgh and answer the charge of law-breaking. Their fines were paid by the Edinburgh Liberals and they returned home as heroes. It was thus that John Macpherson gained for himself the title of the "Glendale Martyr." This preamble is necessary to explain the strange story of the descent of Mrs. Gordon Grant on our Isle and the iridescence with which she irradiated our grey atmosphere.

The first intimation of the lady's arrival was a letter in which she informed John Macpherson that her Highland blood was set afire by the tale of his noble stand for freedom and right, and that she was sending him the sword that her grandfather wielded at the Battle of Waterloo, and that if he enquired at the steamboat office at Portree he



would get a wooden case containing the sword, but she herself was soon coming to the Island and would present the sword to John at a meeting in the town when the Islanders would assemble to do him honour. It was evident that, though her knowledge of the Glendale Martyr's activities had a substantial basis in fact, yet the lady's knowledge of the geography of Skye was imperfect. For Glendale is thirty miles from Portree and its port is Dunvegan and not Portree. John did not, however, attach much importance to the letter, for from what he had seen in Edinburgh when he waited the pleasure of the Lords of Session, he had wisely concluded that there were a lot of strange women in the world. But he told a neighbour who was going to Portree to call at the pier and bring with him in the mail-coach a small box if it was there. This the neighbour agreed to do. He got the wooden case at the pier, went to the Portree Hotel and deposited it there until the mail-coach should leave; and then, the day being cold and the Island beverage a sovereign remedy against chills, when the mail started he forgot the sword. When on the morrow John enquired about the sword, Angus did not have it. "Did you get it at the pier?"—"Oh yes." "What did you do with it?" Angus was hazy on that point. At last the clouds broke. "Oh yes, I remember, I left it in the Portree Hotel." At that John smiled a smile of sympathetic understanding, and thought no more about it. On some future market day he would enquire at the hotel himself. A sword, in any case, was of no use to him. A good cromag with which to give a knock to a cow straying in the corn or catch a wandering sheep would be useful: but a sword! "Angus," he said reassuringly, "you have done what I probably would have done myself at your age: you have done wonderfully well." So the sword of honour abode at the hotel awaiting the great hour of its presentation, and John Macpherson awaited with no impatience his accolade.

## § 2

SOME three weeks later, a letter from Mrs. Gordon Grant came to the hotel engaging rooms for herself and her secretary. They proposed staying for some weeks in the Island. When the landlord read that the lady was bringing a secretary, he realised that a new experience had come his way. He had acquired a varied knowledge of the strange ways of the Sassenachs, but never before had a lady brought a secretary in her train. She must be a great lady indeed, bringing a secretary. Women did such strange things in these days: they even wrote books and went shooting stags: a secretary! What next? But the landlord was so impressed that he prepared his best rooms, and set

aside the only private sitting-room he possessed for the sole use of the lady and her secretary. But with all her preparations for a dignified entry she forgot to specify the exact date of arrival. With the result that Mrs. Gordon Grant and her secretary walked into the Royal Hotel at six p.m. Mr. Lachlan Ross from his window saw them coming, and immediately came forth to receive them, so impressed was he with the dignified bearing of the lady.

"I have engaged rooms," said Mrs. Gordon Grant. "Let me introduce my secretary."

Mr. Ross glanced at the secretary, and somehow or other felt himself repelled by the perfection of that young man's London attire and his waxed moustache. And he suddenly felt a frost in the air. He had had a very recent experience when an innocent-looking oldish man signed his visitors' book, Lord Invercairney and Mrs. Glegg. Now, the Royal Hotel was immaculate, and Mr. Ross appeared in their room as they were going to unpack.

"I must ask you to find accommodation elsewhere," said he.

"What do you mean?" asked the innocent-looking stranger.

"This hotel is a respectable house," answered Ross; "we don't allow that sort of thing. There are other hotels in the town; you must go to one of these."

"What on earth has got into your head?" asked the stranger in a voice that had now an edge to it.

"That is my reason," said Ross, and he handed a slip of paper, "Lord Invercairney and Mrs. Glegg."

The little man gazed at it in perplexity, and then the light broke and he laughed heartily. "Oh," said he, "this is truly funny, to think of King James VI playing one a trick like this after two hundred and eighty years." And he told Ross how James had made "the carls lords, but refused to make the carlines ladies." So that a Judge of the Court of Session and his wife went about the world with different names!

That had happened a few days before, and Ross had not yet quite recovered from the shock of his blunder. But he would have no more of that sort of thing. So he glared at the immaculate garments of the secretary once more and at the marvellous complexion of the lady, and he said firmly:

"No, there have been no rooms engaged for a lady and her secretary."

"Isn't this the Portree Hotel?" she asked.

"You are quite right," replied Ross; "if you mean the best hotel in Portree, that it undoubtedly is. But its real name is the Royal Hotel, Portree; the hotel you engaged rooms in is no doubt the hotel

at the corner of the street that calls itself Portree Hotel. When it comes to giving names there is no such thing as modesty. The Portree Hotel! as if there were no other! And there is also Portree House, as if the town had no other! That is a form of pride that I scorn."

"You call your hotel 'The Royal Hotel.' Does that not mean that the other hotels in the town are mere commercial inns?"

"That's exactly what it means," replied Ross; "nobody could put it in better words."

It was thus that Mrs. Gordon Grant and her secretary arrived at the Portree Hotel. But she quickly discovered how wise she had been in her choice. "Comfort is what I love," said she, as she examined the rooms so carefully prepared for the lady who was bringing a secretary to the Island.

## § 3

MRS. GORDON GRANT and her secretary soon made their presence felt. The first place she visited was the scene of the Battle of the Braes. After a night's rest she drove to the Cumhag in the best carriage-and-pair which Portree could provide. Mr. Dugald MacLachlan, the Bank agent, accompanied her. He showed with minute knowledge the extraordinary natural strength of the position held by the people against the invaders. On the one side of the road there is a sheer precipice of 230 feet, over the bank of which one fell to certain death on the rocks below; on the other, a declivitous hillside that nobody could climb except on all fours.

"The Pass of Thermopylae could not have been stronger than this," said the secretary.

"It is strange the police ever got through," exclaimed Mrs. Gordon Grant.

Then Mr. MacLachlan explained how it was done. Boulders sent rolling down the hill would certainly have swept the police, sheriffs, and fiscals over the precipice. But that could not be done without the prisoners also being killed. It was an old device of invaders to place their prisoners in the front line. The police had placed the prisoners on their exposed flank.

"That may have been so," said the lady; "but with fifty stout women I would myself hold this pass against an army."

A meeting was held in the school in the evening, and Mrs. Gordon Grant made a speech which set the hearts of the Braes men throbbing with pride. She proved herself a born orator. There were some in the audience who did not understand all she said, so refined and so very English was her diction; but most of them understood every word,

and all of them found themselves captivated by the flash of her eye, the perfection of her elocution, and her dramatic gestures. After expressing her indignation at the wrongs done to the Highlanders in the last hundred years, she congratulated the Braes men on their triumphant stand for freedom and righteousness.

"Men of the Braes," she concluded, "your names will be enshrined in history with the heroes who fought at Bannockburn. There the Macdonalds were on the right of the Scottish host who conquered the tyrant; and here you have fought a last fight for freedom. On the hill above the pass where you fought like the heroes who held the Pass of Thermopylae, a future generation will raise a monument to commemorate your noble deeds. And strangers passing through the Sound of Raasay, seeing the monument on the hill, will ask, 'What is that on the crest of the hill?'; and the answer will be, 'That is the monument of those who fought the last fight for freedom in the Kingdom, and ended evictions and oppressions for ever.'"

The Braes never heard such a cheer as that which rang out when Mrs. Gordon Grant, with her secretary and the banker, drove off to Portree.

"I never heard anything like that," said Murdo the Bard. "What eloquence! What beauty! It is proud we ought to be that a lady like that should come all the way from London to give us a word of good cheer."

"I remember," replied Ian Ban, "when *The Lady of the Isles* was at Nice the butler said to me, 'let us go for a trip to Monte Carlo.' And if there is a beautiful place in all the world it is Monte Carlo. The flowers there bloom all the year round; and men clothed in silvery coats go about with long sticks and spikes at the end so that with no trouble they just lift on the point of the lance into golden baskets any leaf that falls on the green swards. And the music of bands rises heavenward all the day. But what I remember is a lady, dressed all in purple, leading a dog whose hairy coat was all purple, and the long thong of leather was all purple, and the high heels of her shoes were purple—and her face was as like that lady's as two peas. The same bloom on the cheeks that God never made!"

"And how is that place kept so beautiful? Who keeps it up?" asked Murdo.

"It is supported by gambling—roulette they call it—they come from all over the world to try their luck against the bank in Monte Carlo, and the bank in the end always wins; yet they go there in droves; for, after all, men are just fools."

"Did you try your luck?"

"Not I," answered Ian. "But the butler and I listened to the music and had our bottle of wine and we spent the pleasantest day in our life. But the lady with the purple poodle was just the image of Mrs. Gordon Grant. And her secretary, his like were there in droves. It looked the most respectable place in the world; but it had a sort of feeling as if you were in a churchyard: with flowers on all the graves but rotting bodies a couple of feet or so below the ground. Yes! it was like that."

"Now you have set me thinking," said Alasdair MacChallum. "Twenty-four years ago, in Fraserburgh, I listened to a young woman preaching at a street corner. She was clever. When she stopped preaching she invited questions, and a cheeky youth asked her, 'How did Jonah live three days and three nights in the whale's belly?' 'I can't tell you, but when I get to heaven I'll ask him,' she answered. 'But what if you don't find him in heaven?' 'Oh, then you will ask him,' she flashed back. That impudent young man went away sorrowful. But the voice of that young woman was just as like the voice of Mrs. Gordon Grant as the echo is like its parent. That young woman in Fraserburgh moved me deeply. It wasn't what she said, but it was the first time I heard a woman preach. The amazing thing to me was that she should be doing it at all."

"Let your women keep silence in the churches," quoted Murdo.

"She was preaching in the open air," retorted Alasdair. "St. Paul never meant 'Let the woman be silent everywhere.' St. Paul knew what was impossible as well as any man. But I tell you, men, that lady from London is as like to the preaching lassie in Fraserburgh as it is possible for a woman after twenty years to be like what she once was. I tell you, as I looked at her I saw the black straw bonnet with the ribbons under the chin and the yellow curls peeping out under it. I heard again the voice with music trilling in it. . . . And I awoke, and there was Mrs. Gordon Grant with the same music in her voice."

"This is a revelation," replied Murdo. "Who would have thought that a man so wise as Alasdair ever wore his heart on his sleeve?"

#### § 4

IN Portree the secretary made all the arrangements for the presentation of the sword to John Macpherson. The banker told him whom to invite to a reception in the hotel. And when the company assembled, every person of importance in the village was there; and when all were duly seated, the secretary ushered in Mrs. Gordon Grant. She was

received with a resounding cheer, and as she flashed her eyes round the room her smile lit up the corners. Every person there was convinced that the smile was for him alone. She presided as a matter of course, and ere she presented the sword she delivered an address which stirred the heart.

She briefly recalled the wrongs inflicted on the Highlanders: she pictured the glens left to the sheep and deer: she recited the Canadian Exile's lament. Nobody in that room had ever before realised the power of language to move the heart. She recalled what the settler said when Norman MacLeod congratulated him on his prospering in Canada, "But there are nae linties in the woods here, and nae braes like Yarrow," and she recalled the Ten Thousand Skye men who had fought in the Napoleonic wars and acted a heroic part in every battle from Corunna to Waterloo.

"When war comes again and the nation will have to do or die, will the deer and the sheep fight for them?"

And then, with a swift transition, she began to speak of the Battle of the Braes and of the Glendale men going to Edinburgh in obedience to the law, and of how John Macpherson had there faced the red Lords of Session, a Daniel in a den of lions. And lifting the sword, she held it with both her hands and, presenting the hilt to John, said:

"Let this sword which my grandfather wielded with honour at Waterloo be to your descendants a memorial of the honour you gained by fighting the battle of the poor, and of the fame which you won. Glory to the brave."

The company sprang to their feet as John gripped the sword and raised its point heavenward. And in a speech of the purest Gaelic he thanked the noble lady and said that the sword would be the dearest possession of his family. It would be treasured by the whole Island as the memorial not of anything he had done but of the resolution and bravery of the men and women who rose at last in their might and broke the yoke of tyranny.

When the presentation was thus made, Mrs. Gordon Grant intimated that refreshments would now be served. And a choice of alcoholic or soft drinks was given. In a few minutes there arose a buzz of animated conversation. Up rose the secretary and proposed the toast of the Skye Martyrs. The burden of his speech was: Down with the Oligarchs: Death to all tyrants. As a speech it was a deadly failure. Not a cheer was evoked. But glasses were refilled and the company duly honoured the released prisoners of war.

There followed an unexpected intervention. The old parish schoolmaster, Murdo Macdonald, who had retired not long before,

felt his spirit stirred within him by the secretary's speech and rose to speak. And this, as I heard it repeated, was what he said:

"Before we separate, we must express our gratitude to Mrs. Gordon Grant for this opportunity of meeting her and doing honour to John Macpherson, who has deserved well of his countrymen. But before I propose the toast of our hostess, let me say that this Island owes much to the noble family of Macdonald. Who founded and laid out this town?—The eighteenth Chief, James Macdonald. Who built the pier and thus made the town a trading centre?—Lord Macdonald. Who did everything to encourage the tourist traffic by providing ferries and hotels? Who established the first Grammar School in the Hebrides and made it a condition that Greek be taught in it?—Lord Macdonald. If wrongs were done, it was by factors dressed in a little brief authority, when the Chief was a minor and unable to protect his clan. There were ties of blood and of kindred uniting the people and their Chief which would outlast all the misunderstandings of the present day. It wasn't the house of Macdonald, but the Sutherlands and Campbells that had made the Highland glens desolate. But we are deeply grateful to our noble hostess for visiting our Island and for encouraging us by her presence and for cheering our hearts by her words, and for making us realise what a perfection of diction is attainable by human lips."

And so Murdo Macdonald asked the company to stand and drink the toast of the hostess. And this they did with a rousing cheer.

The human heart is a harp of many chords. And the most moving of these is the memory of the days of old and of battles long ago. As Murdo Macdonald spoke of the Chiefs and all they had done for the Island, of Sir James Macdonald dying in Rome far from home and kindred, leaving the town of Portree as his monument, a soft and tender look suffused every face. They were clansmen and not Irish gunmen!

It was in replying to this toast that Mrs. Gordon Grant rose to heights of oratory. She thanked Mr. Macdonald for his beautiful speech. Nobody appreciated the ties which bound the clan to the Chief more than she. For she belonged to two great clans, the Gordons and the Grants. She told how her Chief, the Duke of Richmond and Gordon, celebrated his coming of age by a great dinner to his tenantry, and how the oldest farmer in proposing the toast of His Grace had said that he had now seen three Dukes of Gordon and that he hoped before he died to see a fourth! Upon which the young Duke fervently murmured, "I hope not." She also hoped that Lord Macdonald would long live to enjoy the loyalty and affection of the great Clan Donald and that the hatchet would soon be buried. What they were doing in the Island was winning security not for themselves so much as for the

people scattered over the whole of the North Country, and it was as pioneers of the new freedom that they honoured the men who had fought the fight.

Thus the ceremony ended in great amity. But it was generally conceded that the honours of the day rested with the old schoolmaster. Over and over again at the bars and public places was the old slogan heard that night: "Na Donhnallaich aig deireadh an la" (The Macdonalds at the end of the day).

## § 5

IN the hotel overlooking the bay; Sheriff Ivory waited impatiently for the coming of the gunboat and the Royal Marines wherewith he was to crush the rebellious and stiff-necked Islanders. He had appealed for police to all possible towns and counties, but all refused. He then appealed for a military expedition to overawe the rebels: but the Government refused. Sir William Harcourt, the Home Secretary, was uncompromising in his reply. Then there came a change of Government, and a gunboat was lent to the Sheriff that the Queen's Writ might run once more in the Hebrides. As the days passed and his appeals for help to put down the agitators were unheeded, he became obsessed with the conviction that the safety of the whole country rested on his shoulders. And when he read how in Ireland a landlord was assassinated or cattle maimed or families brought to ruin by boycott, he was more and more convinced that he and he alone remained as a bulwark against chaos. And as he mused on his solitary calling as the sole protector of his country, there arose on his horizon the dazzling and bewildering splendour of Mrs. Gordon Grant. He could not move without meeting her. And he could not be blind to the fact that every face lit up at her approach, and every hat was raised in salute, while he himself saw none but averted faces. But that, he thought, was the common lot of all the men who were destined to save the world from ruin.

In the night watches while he waited for the force which the new Government promised to send him, he was inspired to attempt a new strategy. Why should he not win to his side this dynamic woman who had burst on the island with the radiance of a new star? So on the morrow he called on Mrs. Gordon Grant at her hotel and asked her to dine with him. He explained that he would ask the factor and his wife to meet her. "Mr. Macdonald," said he, "knows more about the Island than anybody in Scotland. It will greatly interest you to meet him." So the dinner-party in the Sheriff's hotel was arranged.



Of that dinner-party suffice it to say that it was the Sheriff's pleasantest memory of the weary months of storm and stress through which he was passing. Mrs. Gordon Grant proved an excellent raconteur. She never met anywhere people so pleasant and so friendly as the Skye folk.

"If you had a clod on your face and a stone on your skull as I have had, you would have a different impression," said the Sheriff.

"I agree with Mrs. Gordon Grant," said the factor; "were it not for agitators coming in among them and stirring them up with wild harangues, they would be the kindest people in the world."

"No agitator can stir up people if they are happy and contented," said Mrs. Gordon Grant. "The agitator's seed only bears fruit when there is ground ready to receive it."

"The agitator can prepare the ground for the seed," said Mrs. Macdonald, smiling demurely. "John Mackay said to me after a big meeting they held in the town, 'I never knew I was badly off until I heard Mr. Campbell speak.'"

That morning the gunboat with two auxiliaries had arrived, and after dinner, while the two ladies were comparing notes about the latest fashions in London, there came from the fireside words and stray sentences of the Sheriff's conversation with the factor.

Mrs. Gordon Grant caught the words: "most disturbed area: march from Staffin to Uig": and then "Thursday": and "Glendale Friday."

When she got back to her hotel she dictated letters to her secretary which on the morrow were sent by special messenger to Staffin and Uig, advising the people what to do. And a letter was sent by special messenger also to John Macpherson in Glendale saying that on the day following the march from Staffin to Uig the Royal Marines were to march through the Glen, and asking the people to assemble; and that she herself would arrive about noon and would welcome the Queen's Royal Marines on behalf of the Glen. And thus matters were arranged.

## § 6

It was one of those special days which the Island provides at intervals to beguile the hearts of strangers within her gates. Every peak of the hills stood silhouetted against a sky of deepest blue. Shimmering clouds caressed the slopes. The massive ridge of Quiraing looked down on Staffin Bay with that calm majesty and supreme indifference with which nature surveys the activities of men. Success or failure, victory or defeat, joy or sorrow are all alike impostors so

far as nature is concerned. On the bride and on the weeping widow the same sun looks down with perfect indifference. Nature abates no note of its joyousness though the world be strewn with the debris of vanquished empires. That naval expedition—a gunboat with two transports—steaming into Staffin Bay, that a thousand poor and oppressed folk might perceive the power and the majesty of the British Empire, and the folly of resisting the might of its laws, was dwarfed by the mountains into a noisy and intrusive vulgarity. “I was reared at the base of the Coolins,” was the answer of the ghillie, who, on his return from a first visit to London, was asked if he was not greatly impressed by the size and height of St. Paul’s. The roar of artillery is reduced to mere fireworks by the crashing of a thunderstorm.

From all quarters the people flocked to the shore as the gunboat with its two escorts cast anchor in the bay. With the precision and rapidity of perfect discipline the Marines landed at the jetty. The people stood on the banks and cheered. A mast was quickly set up above the tide-mark and a Union Jack fluttered in the breeze. The Commander was nonplussed. He had come to suppress a rebellion and he was welcomed with rapturous glee! The Marines formed up on the road that runs along the shore.

When the Marines were waiting the order to march, the leader of the crowd, a man who had graduated in Aberdeen but had to return to the paternal croft owing to failing health, stepped forward to the officer in charge, saluted smartly, and welcomed him to the Island.

“Sir,” said Martin, “we wish you and your gallant men ‘ceud mile failte.’<sup>1</sup> As loyal subjects of the Queen, we welcome her sailors and her soldiers. We are grateful to Her Majesty for the kind thought which moved her to send you to visit us. It is only what we would expect from Her Gracious Majesty. She has not forgotten that this Island sent ten thousand men to fight the battles of her grandfather against Napoleon, and that at Waterloo a Macdonald held the gates of Huguemont. Her Majesty has doubtless remembered that Field-Marshal Sir Donald Stewart sprang from this our Island, and so sent you to do us honour. We have waited a long time for a recognition of our Island’s heroic loyalty: and we are very thankful that our eyes have beheld Her Majesty’s forces coming at last among us to do us honour.”

Then he turned to the crowd, who had listened with wonder and admiration and approval to his speech.

“Like true and loyal Highlanders, I ask you to give a cheer of welcome to our guests, the Royal Marines.”

<sup>1</sup> A hundred thousand welcomes.

That cheer rolled upward to Quiraing with such force that an eagle on a pinnacle of the rock rose suddenly on poised wings.

"There must be some mistake," said the Commander, "for I understood that an outbreak of lawlessness was the occasion of our being sent to this Island."

"Sir, you are quite right, lawlessness indeed has broken out in this Island. You understand, sir, that under Lord Macdonald we were a happy and prosperous community. But Lord Macdonald, in an evil day for us, sold this part of the Island. Our new landlord at once doubled and trebled our rents. In proportion as the prices of sheep and cattle fell, this tyrant increased our burdens. If the oppression of the poor be lawlessness, then truly Trotternish has seen lawlessness enough."

"I suggest," said Sheriff Ivory, "that we march."

The order was given and the Marines set out to march over the ridge of the hill road to Uig. There in the evening the gunboat was to meet them. There was a warrior who marched his army up a hill only to march them down again. But the Royal Marines in Skye landed from their ships, marched across a promontory, and embarked on the same ships again. And the cheering of the populace as they accompanied them on the way made them look as foolish as they felt. The Commander's face was set as a flint. And Ivory could find no words to break a sulphurous silence, and at last walked behind. It was strange how differently things could fall out from what one expected.

## § 7

THE plans of Sheriff Ivory and of the Commander of the flotilla sent to overawe the law-breakers of Skye were known, as I have said, to Mrs. Gordon Grant. She knew that the expedition would anchor that night in Uig Bay and on the following morning would sail to Loch Pooltiel, and that the Marines would land there and have a route-march through Glendale. She got a long strip of cotton on which the local painter put in bold letters "God Save the Queen," and below, in smaller letters, "Ceud mile failte," and taking that with her, she and her secretary drove in the early morning the thirty miles to Glendale. She arrived at eleven o'clock and got a great welcome from the people, who regarded her as a celestial visitor come to deliver them out of their distresses. Immediately the secretary set to work. He got two old masts, and the Glendale fishermen erected them and stretched between them across the road the banner of loyalty and welcome. And there, where the shingle met the grass, flaunted the

symbol of Glendale's devotion to the Queen and of the Glen's adherence to the ancient traditions of Highland hospitality. Below that banner Sheriff Ivory and the Commander of the flotilla and the Marines must needs pass.

Just as this was finished the ships came round the point and steamed into the bay. The rapidity with which the Navy moved fairly left the Glendale fishermen breathless. But if the Marines were quick the secretary was as quick. He marshalled the people of Glendale on a little hillock beside the road, and Mrs. Gordon Grant spoke to them and asked them, when the Marines had passed below the welcoming banner, to join with her in singing the National Anthem. And naturally she interpreted silence as consent. She did not know that in Glendale hymns were banned, and that God Save the Queen was rightly classified as a hymn.

In rapid succession event followed event. Landing-craft swept the shore and the Marines quickly formed up on the beach. The march up the glen began. They passed under the welcoming banner, at which the Commander glanced and winced. Sent to quell rebels, he was welcomed in the name of his Queen. What a strange world! Sheriff Ivory walked beside him and glanced at the banner, and his face flushed. There was no understanding of these people. One day they would pelt him with clods and the next they would welcome him with cheers. He, the Queen's representative in the County, armed with her authority, received the cheers as his rightful due! But they sounded sinister. As the expedition emerged from under the streamer the welcoming cheers arose; and when the Marines were twenty yards from the marshalled crowd, Mrs. Gordon Grant gave the signal and, facing the massed population of Glendale with her secretary beside her, began to sing God Save the Queen. But, to her amazement, no voice joined except that of her secretary.

She stopped and made a gesture with her hands that would make even the hillocks sing; but no voice arose except her secretary's. The Marines were now passing. She couldn't begin again. So the National Anthem became a duet. Two verses she sang in a voice that trilled like a bird. She was at the second verse when the Commander came up alongside. He halted and stood at attention while his company and the Sheriff passed on.

That was the worst moment in Mrs. Gordon Grant's so exciting and so varied career. She had left one fact out of her calculation, and that was that the people of Glendale knew little English, had never learnt to sing the National Anthem, and that the words and the tune were as strange to them as the National Anthem of the Turks. But

she was equal to the occasion; for no sooner did the duet end than she called out, "Let us give a cheer for the Queen," and the cheers rose to heaven and came back echoed by the hills; and then she called out, "Let us give a cheer for the Royal Navy and the Royal Marines," and again the cheers arose with a will and were wafted out to sea where the flotilla swung at anchor.

"Madam," said the Commander, stepping up smartly, "I thank you in the name of Her Majesty and the Royal Navy. But we were sent here to quell rebels. We were prepared for bullets, but not for a welcome such as you have given us."

"Rebels?" said she, looking him in the eye. "Her Majesty has no more loyal and law-abiding subjects than the people of this Island."

"We have it on the best authority," he retorted, "that they have been breaking the law, and we have been sent to re-establish the authority of the magistrates."

"You know," she broke in, "that law and justice are often far from meaning the same thing. By law the people in this glen were evicted from fertile lands and were crowded into this narrow glen. Their houses were pulled down and they were left to provide what shelter they could in their new habitations. They could only build these black houses you see. In many their cattle are under the same roof and enter by the same door. They have not sufficient grazing for their beasts nor food for themselves. You would not stable your horses in England in the houses which shelter them. They have been reduced to that state by law. By law, fire and sword have made Highland glens a wilderness and their Straths a desolation. What they ask is not law but justice."

"Do tell me," begged the Commander, "what practical application of justice they claim."

"They claim," she explained, "to be restored to their rights as members of the clan. They were deprived by law of their rights in the soil when Parliament transformed their Chiefs into landlords. Probably it never occurred to our law-makers that Chiefs would evict their own children and reduce them to beggary. But that is what happened. You come to re-establish law; what you ought to do is re-establish justice."

The Commander cast a glance up the valley and saw the black houses huddled along the mud track that did duty for a road. He saw the rain-clouds gathering over Macleod's Tables and felt a chill wind blowing down the glen. There flashed on him the memory of a native village he once visited on the Congo and of the naked children playing

under the palms. That sun-kissed village was a paradise compared to this.

"Ah well," he said, "we are subject to orders, and must do what we are told."

"Attila, who ravished Europe," she exclaimed, "never wrought such misery as the English, by law, have wrought in these islands. And the tragedy is that this country was not conquered. It is not worthy of the traditions of the Navy that it should be used to collect the exactions of Shylocks such as the laird of Kilmuir and the men who batten on the dispossessed and the poor. It has freed the slaves, but never before has it been the base lackey of tyrants."

At that he winced.

"Discipline requires," he retorted, "that we do not argue but obey. I cannot but obey."

"No, you needn't," said she. "You can always save your self-respect by resigning."

At that the Commander saluted, turned and followed his men, who had halted in the distance, waiting for him. When he joined them, he at once ordered a return to the ships. When they marched back it was noticed that the Commander walked no more beside Sheriff Ivory.

After that there were no more route-marches by the Royal Marines through the Island. It has not transpired what report the Commander sent to the Admiralty, but the expedition shortly thereafter was recalled. The Islanders were sorry to see them go; for they provided much merriment. The spectacle of three of Her Majesty's ships sent to overawe an island that did not own a single gun, and where the people did not trouble to lock their doors at night, was indeed food for Homeric laughter.

That was the last exploit of Mrs. Gordon Grant in the cause of the oppressed. On the following day, driving back to Portree, she was manifestly depressed. At the top of Drumuie she stopped the carriage and got out. At the roadside she feasted her eyes on a scene of grandeur such as she had not seen in the Island. For the sun had burst forth with splendour and bathed moor and hill and sea in amethystic radiance. The splendid peaks of the Coolins were like golden fingers caressing the clouds.

"This Island is too overwhelming," she said to her secretary. "There is no happy mean. One day it is gloomy as Hades and there is no sound but the howling of the wind and the lashing of the rain on the windows; and the next day all the beauty of Paradise is showered on hills and vales. I can't bear it. To make life endurable you must have stretches of level road where you are not always going up and

coming down. Here you are either on the heights or in the depths; there is no level stretch in life. We must leave tomorrow."

And on the morrow she and her secretary departed from the Island by the steamer. A great crowd gathered on the pier to bid her farewell. For her radiant smile, her hearty greeting, her overflowing sympathy, and above all her unusual beauty, had captured the hearts of the Islanders. The cheers of the Islanders were wafted to the steamer as the gap widened between her and the pier. And Mrs. Gordon Grant stood on the deck waving her hand, and the tears kept streaming down her cheeks. As the *Glencoe* steamed past the Black Rock she stumbled down to the cabin, and there in a corner wept unobserved. Her mission was fulfilled.

## § 8

No sooner was she gone than rumours spread regarding her. She was of that order whom the slanderer can only attack in their absence. The rumours were of many kinds, and which was true and which false it is difficult to say. One rumour had it that she was the daughter of a strolling actor and that the sword which she presented to the Glendale hero never saw Waterloo, but was the very weapon used by her father when on the stage he fought his mimic contests. But another rumour declared that she owned a manor-house and a racing-stud near Newmarket. It was confidently asserted by some that she began her career by preaching as a Salvation Army evangelist in one of Aberdeenshire's fishing towns; and Alasdair MacChallum, when he heard that, at once affirmed its truth. "When I heard her speak in the school," said he, "I had a feeling that I heard her before. That explains it. In Fraserburgh I listened often to the Salvation Army. They seemed to be only at the stage of the infants' class, for they knew nothing of election and predestination and the sovereignty of God; but it was good to listen to them. So that was it." That rumour went on to explain that heredity led her to the stage and that she married a rich man. That would explain the manor-house and the racing-stud.

As the weeks passed, the rumours multiplied and grew more and more depressing. But, for myself, I would fain believe that she was a sincere lover of the poor and of the oppressed. This I am sure of, that she was the means of raising the siege of the Island by Her Majesty's Navy. For it rankled in the memory of the Commander that he and his men should be designated mere tools of capitalistic blood-suckers. He felt his self-respect restored when, steaming south, he saw the Coqlins sink beneath the horizon. I do not want to know the unvarnished facts about Mrs. Gordon Grant. This I do know, that she kindled a

spark of ethical passion in the heart of the Commander. He was visited, for the first time, by a dim sense that the rights of man far transcended the rights of property. He was never seen in the company of Sheriff Ivory after that day's march in Glendale. Whenever I recall that strange episode there comes a wistful sense of life's encompassing mystery. The Supreme Governor uses many unexpected weapons and many strange agents. For humanity is neither white nor black but grey. There would be no progress and no deliverance if He enlisted only saints. . . . But the sword has disappeared, leaving no trace.



## THE KING'S PENSIONER

## § I

THIS RECORD TAKES A LEAP through time from the year 1882 to the year 1918—vaulting over thirty-six years. But the thirty-six years of time are as nothing compared to the centuries of development which were compressed in that brief span. The world was entirely revolutionised; oceans contracted into ponds; the sky was transformed from a roof into a thoroughfare, and all the resources of science were concentrated on the destruction of the human race. The static world of 1882 became a world of flux and change. The Great War was rapidly becoming a legend when I made my way to the house of Murdo the Bard, for I had heard that he had met with an accident. I had come to the Island for my usual summer holiday and was feeling solitary. "All, all are gone, the old familiar faces," I murmured, as I mounted the brae to Murdo's new house. In the long ago, as I have told already, Murdo had planned to build a new house, but the years passed and the house was unbuilt. But one of his sons, who prospered in the Scottish trade in Newcastle, had it built at last. And the cows no longer with their scented breath warmed old Murdo's house for him in the wintertime. And Murdo regretted the passing of the peat-fire glowing in the centre of the floor. "The fire in a grate is no use," he would say, "the heat goes up the chimney, leaving the corners of the room like ice. Give me the old griosach,<sup>1</sup> and the smoke curling up among the sooty rafters, and the heat reaching out to every hole and corner." I am afraid Murdo the Bard was not at all grateful to Alasdair, his son. "I feel like a rowan tree that I uprooted long ago and transplanted."

"What became of it, Murdo?" I asked.

"It withered and died. I took it from a poor soil to good soil; but it faded away, for the poor soil was its native element."

When Sam came to see me in Edinburgh, almost the first person he spoke of was Murdo. He had sat a whole afternoon in the new

<sup>1</sup> A fire of red embers.

house and told Murdo his experiences of life, how at one time he was conveying missionaries from island to island in the South Seas, and how they wearied him with long prayers in the cabin. "I never could bear," said Sam, "a man who in long rambling prayers gives the Omniscient an assortment of miscellaneous information." "I have suffered too in that line," responded Murdo, "but I have always comforted myself with the thought that to the Great and Blessed One their rolling words were no more than 'rod na gaoth tuath'"; (the noise of the shingle dragged down by the swell of the north wind). And Sam told him how much he preferred fighting the Germans to praying with the missionaries. And he told Murdo with a wealth of detail how he had sunk a U-boat in the Caribbean Sea. At that long tale of drowning men and sinking ships Murdo was almost out of his mind with delight. "Sam," he said, "I always declared that you would be a great hero and my words have come true."

Sam declared after his visit to his native Isle that the most intelligent person he found there, next to the old Master, was Murdo the Bard, who never learned to read or write but who never forgot anything he ever heard. He could recite whole chapters from the Bible which he memorised through hearing them read at the services on Sunday. Illiterate, yet he was the most cultured man in Braes. He never forgot even a line of all the ballads he composed!

## § 2

AFTER the new house was built, the sons and daughters went far and wide to seek their fortune, and though they did not forget the old home, yet Murdo and his wife Mary had their difficult days. For each of the children had their own to provide for, and what they could spare got less. When I asked how Mary fared, Murdo paused a moment in thought. "In Fraserburgh," he replied, "I heard a proverb that applies to Mary: 'The foot on the cradle, the hand on the reel, is the sign of a woman that means to do weel.' Mary's foot was rocking the cradle for twenty-five years, and to clothe the family her hand was ever on the reel." With the passing years Murdo could no longer go to Peterhead or Fraserburgh to serve in the fishing season, and the summers, as he grew old, were no longer like the good warm summers that were in the days of his youth. When one summer I asked, on my arrival in the Island, about the weather, Murdo answered: "There has never been a better weather prophet than George Buchanan who said 'Long foul, long fair.' We have had Noah's flood spread over eight weeks, we shall now have the sunshine and a lovely summer."

And so it proved. But whatever the weather, rain or shine, and whatever difficulty came, Murdo always said, "Never one door shuts but another opens," and so took heart again. And when the difficulties of age began to multiply beyond their strength, a wonderful and undreamed-of door opened for Murdo and Mary his wife—a door opening on a land flowing with milk and honey.

One day he was told that if he went down the brae to the old Master and answered a few questions on a bit of paper he would get a pension for all the rest of their lives for Mary and himself—five shillings a week for each until they died. When he told Mary what he heard, she said that it sounded too good to be true, to which Murdo replied that God was over all and that with Him nothing was ever too good to be true. So Murdo took his staff in hand and went down the steep brae to the old schoolhouse, where the Master, his school now closed, spent his days musing on the marvels of that mercy that had elected him to eternal life while so great a multitude were doomed to be fuel for eternal flames. There is no doubt of the comfort flowing from such a belief. The Master had grave doubts regarding Murdo's destiny, for Murdo in old age still composed worldly rhymes and was even known to whistle on Saturday night when he should be composing his mind for the blessed Sabbath. But the Master was greatly pleased at the prospect of Murdo having more of the comforts of this life before experiencing the discomforts of the next. So he produced the Schedule and began to fill it up as Murdo answered the questions.

MASTER. How old are you?

MURDO. It is difficult to be sure of the exact number, but I remember the Church being broken up and the potato blight and famine that followed. Those were terrible days, Master. I remember a stranger coming to our house and my father invited him to stay for dinner. "The wife is in the ebb and a hen is in the creel," said my father. My mother was gathering whelks for our dinner and there would be one egg. I have often thought, Master, that for so holy a deed as the separation of the saints from the evil State and the purifying of the Church from the corruption of Caesar, that the Holy One would have rewarded us with blessed sunshine and fruitful seasons: but no! He sent a famine. Can you explain it, Master? I was grown up then, so I must be over seventy. But you will know, Master.

The Master shied from the theological problem and hastened to assure him that he was of full age for the pension. What about Mary? She too was the full age, for she also remembered all the things that he remembered, and even the big flood. And her father was in Waterloo,

and she was the eldest of the family. "But," added Murdo, "ladies' ages are delicate matters to handle, Master." The Master agreed, and suggested two years younger than Murdo's. "That's about it, Master, but you should have seen Mary that year we were married: her skin was like cream, and the sun glinting in her hair was like the gold of Ophir. The old proverb was proved true for me: 'Like blood, like good, and like age make a happy marriage.' Now Mary's age is just the same as mine, except for two years or so, and the blood, the same."

Here the Master broke in and definitely fixed Mary's age at seventy-three. But the amity of the interview was suddenly overcast, for the next question was: "Were you ever in prison?"

MURDO. Me in prison? It is insulting me you are, Master. . . .

MASTER. It is not I who am asking, it is this Schedule. I know well that you have never been in prison.

MURDO. Who put it in the Schedule?

MASTER. The Schedule is put out by an Act of the King's Parliament.

MURDO. The King, blessed be he, would never ask an ill-mannered question like that of a man like me who reared twelve children for him—eight valiant soldiers in the day of need. The Island never produced braver fighters than my sons. You remember, Master, what the Colonel of the 57th called out to his men on the heights of Albuera: "Die hard, my men, die hard!" My eight sons will make real die-hards, and I think better of the King than that he would insult their father with a question like that.

The schoolmaster, realising that the filling of the Schedule would be a full day's work at the rate of progress achieved until then, explained quickly that the King was the best-mannered man in the Three Kingdoms, and that he would never think of asking such a question, but that an ill-bred clerk had inserted the question without the King's knowledge. Murdo had a last word about that clerk! "Set a beggar on horseback, and he'll ride to the deil." These clerks who insult men like me," concluded Murdo, "began in the midden."

So the Schedule was filled and signed with an X, his mark!

In the course of time word was sent to Murdo that the schoolmaster had five shillings for himself and his wife, and that all he had to do was to come and fetch it. So Murdo went down the hill and got the money, counting it over and over. "I never saw such beautiful money, shining like the sun," said he. "Shall I get this every week?" "Every Friday," was the answer of the old schoolmaster, who was friend and counsellor and letter-writer and amateur lawyer and postmaster for miles and miles. Murdo blessed the King and blessed the Master, and gave

thanks to the Great and Good who feedeth even the sparrows. Afterwards he described his feelings. "When I got that money," said he, "bha mi 'nam cheo's nam bhreislich" (I was like a man in a mist and in a dream). I had done no work for it. I did not deserve it, I had not fought or been wounded fighting for the King, yet he gave me that shining money. When I got home I handed Mary ten shillings—her own and my own, for Mary could always make one shilling do the work of two—and I said to her, 'Mary, my love,' says I, 'the Master said we will get this every Friday. It cannot be true, Mary, beloved of my heart, such a thing could not last. Think of all the old people like us in the Three Kingdoms—millions there must be, and each getting five shillings a week from the King. The King no doubt has deep money-boxes, but they cannot stand that. God bless him, he would if he could, but he would be bankrupt in no time. I won't go down the brae next week, it would be no good.' But when Friday came again, Mary says to me, 'Go down, Murdo; I have more faith in the good King, for who knows how much money he has got in his boxes.' And I went, and there it was again, and has gone on ever since, and the blessed King, the Master tells me, is richer than ever. That, however, is what I ought to have remembered, for the Good Book says that he who giveth to the poor lendeth to the Lord. The King will be richer than ever, for the interest the Holy One pays puts all the banks to shame. When I said that to the Master he said that the King would be richer than Krusus (Croesus) when the High and Holy One paid him all the interest he deserves. What I said to Mary that second time when I handed over to her ten shining shillings was this: 'An righ beannaichte, tha mi 'n dochas gu bheil e a chumail beagan aige fein' (The blessed King, I hope he is keeping a little for himself). Alas! Mary has now gone to the King Eternal, and not even the blessed King can give her five shillings now. But she had a lovely and carefree eventide owing to the blessed King. Providence will reward him in the end!"

That was years and years ago, and Murdo renewed his youth. He had his own potatoes and milk and mutton from the hill. When the saith shoaled he could catch a basketful fishing from the rocks. "I am as well off as the King himself, blessings be on him," Murdo would say. And as the folk along the shore grew old, Murdo kept a tally of their years, for he was anxious lest the King should be taken advantage of. For it seemed that everybody had got suddenly older. So Murdo kept a mental record of his own. The story he loved best to tell was that of Ian Dubh (black John), who was still known as "dubh" though his hair was now grey and scanty. On that fateful year on which the

King opened his purse, Murdo and Ian met on the road—Murdo on his way to fish on the rocks, and Ian to the hill for a creel of peats. And they stopped to talk as people do where time is not and the summer evening far away.

"Well, Ian," said Murdo, "it is yourself that walks with the light step for so old a man."

"Me old!" exclaimed Ian. "I am not old: I am in the prime of life."

"You are sixty-five if a day," rejoined Murdo. "I remember well when you were born and my mother spent days helping your mother. Neighbours were neighbours then and helped each other for love and not for money. Today they will not do a hand's turn without money in the hand. The times are changed, Ian, from the good old days when we were young."

"Speak for yourself," retorted Ian. "I have no knowledge of old days yet. I am far even from sixty, much less seventy and more as you now are."

"Seventy and more!" exclaimed Murdo. "So I am, and grateful I ought to be to Providence who has given me so many beautiful years and twelve dutiful children. As for you, Ian, you will never see sixty-five again."

The two old men parted much sooner than they expected or than was their wont.

Up on the hill Ian met Seoras a Scholair (George the Student), and George told Ian the great news, how the King and Parliament were passing a new law and how everybody aged seventy was to get five shillings a week pension.

Murdo's fishing was a failure, and returning home he met Ian Dubh again, and Murdo tells the story thus:

"When he saw me he began to walk heavily, like an old, old man, very tired, whose strength was no longer equal to the burden, and again we stood to pass the time of day.

"Murdo," says he in an ingratiating and conciliatory voice, 'Murdo, since I saw you I have been thinking.'

"There is room for thinking," says I, 'and especially over the matter of your age.'

"It was just of that I was thinking," says he, 'and I began to remember things which I thought I had never known.'

"What sort of things?" I asked.

"Well," said he, 'I remember when Donald son of Ewen son of Donald son of Ian got married. I got conversation lozenges at the wedding, but his son is now about sixty-five. Now, I must have been

five then to remember. I am now certain that I am not a day short of seventy-one years of age.'

"'You are not that,' I replied. 'You are sixty-five and not a day more.'

"But he got quite angry. An hour before, he got angry because I said he was old, but that was nothing to his anger now when I said he was young. I never knew a man grow old so quick. In the course of taking home one creel of peats Ian Dubh aged ten years."

"Did he get the pension at once?" I asked.

"That did he," replied Murdo, "for Ian Dubh—God rest him—was a man of quirks and twists. He was like an eel, you could get hold of him nowhere. To get money he added ten years to his age. That was the sort of man he was—Ian Dubh's one hand would not wash his other hand for nothing."

"Are the folks still getting old fast?" I asked Murdo on a later day.

"No," he replied, "it is no use now, for they turn up the registers that began to be kept over seventy years ago. Nobody can get the better of a register. It is a sore temptation removed from the path of godly men. That was a wise move of the King long ago—or the Queen, God rest her—that register. Registers tell no lies. They don't add ten years to a man's life when he is carrying home one creel of peats. Nobody can take advantage of the King now—God keep him."

### § 3

WHEN in August 1914 the Great War burst on the world like a thunderclap, Murdo still walked the hills with a light step and cast his peats as in the days of youth. For all his sons at once enlisted, and though he was bordering on eighty he went to Portree and offered to serve as a soldier. "I can see as good as ever," said he, "and I could shoot those hounds of Germans right enough." There wasn't anyone in the Island quite so patriotic as Murdo. "There is nothing I would not do for the King," said he, "for he did great things for Mary and me." But he had to be content that his sons and one grandson should face the Germans.

When all the young men had gone, some small repairs had to be made on the roof of Murdo's new house and there was nobody left who could do it except himself. So he got his ladder and tools ready and climbed up to the chimney-head. But he slipped and fell, breaking the brittle bones of eighty years. "It would not have happened in my old house," explained Murdo afterwards, "for if you slipped on that roof there was a heather rope to snatch and it would hold you fast;

for on these new-fangled roofs if you slip you roll and there's nothing to catch: and you are like a stone rolling downhill: in splinters at the bottom." As he lay on his bed he often relieved his pains by anathematising the enemy. "That cursed Kaiser," he would say. "I would not wish him in his latter end greater sufferings than I have had to endure, and I owe them to him. Were it not for that man of Belial I would not have been on that roof." Everybody said Murdo would die; they counted up all the old men who had broken their bones in the townships for sixty years and more, and they all died from the shock. But Murdo's spirit was unquenchable. "I must see the end of the war," he would say. And when he began to get better, he got crutches and crawled at last to the door, and there, leaning against the wall, he gazed with a hungry look at the sea shimmering in the summer haze and at the hills, cloud-flecked, standing sentinel around. "What a beautiful world!" he murmured. "The Creator of Heaven and Earth be praised." And he composed a new song celebrating the meeting of day and night, the mingling of light and shadows, and the miracle of eyes dim with the shadow of death suddenly being cleared and seeing all that glory as if for the first time. And when, miracle of miracles, the great victory came he sang another new song. "Fionn," declared he, "never made war without a victorious peace at the end, and the King, Heaven be praised, is Fionn come back again."

## § 4

ON that strange summer after the war ended, the first visit I paid on my return to the Island was to Murdo. I found him sitting at the door, gazing at a great splash of silver on the Sound, while a cloudy sheep-fleece with edges of gold hung over Dun Can.

"So the Master is away, God rest him," said Murdo in a voice all tenderness. "Many a day he read me the news out of the *Scotsman*, and there was no word too difficult for him to put into the Gaelic. If they would only put a bit of Gaelic in the *Scotsman* I would get it myself and my granddaughter could read it to me, but some folk never know the right thing to do. Every Friday when I went down for my pension he would take the *Scotsman* and tell me all the news. The Master—it was only once I was angry with him, and that was when he asked me if I had ever been in prison: I, that never broke a law in my life, for, mark you, shooting a heather-hen (grouse) or taking a salmon from a river is no crime, for God alone makes and feeds them. Ay, he was good at the *Scotsman* and the news. When we lost battles and guns he and I would shed tears together; but when victories were



won on sea or land we were neither to 'haud nor to bind.' Ay, there was nobody in the Island better at the news."

And I, in my turn, taking up the Master's task, began to tell Murdo the news. But those were the days when we waged war on each other, when every class went on strike except preachers and doctors and school-masters. And these probably would have struck too if they had not known that nobody would heed them. But the coal-strikes simply bored Murdo.

"Look at my peat-stack, as dry as powder," said he. "What do I care about miners? I never burned a bit of coal in my house all my life."

Then I remembered an odd bit of news in that day's paper.

"You know about King Ferdinand of Bulgaria," said I, "and how he fought with the Germans and Turks against us?"

"Well that," answered Murdo. "Often did the Master tell me about that old fox, and glad am I that he lost the war, his kingdom, and everything."

"Long before the war," I went on, "he placed five hundred thousand pounds in a bank in London so that he might have money to fall back on if his kingdom went against him."

"The nasty quirker!" exclaimed Murdo. "He is as great a liar as the rat is a thief."

"Well, with all his scheming he has lost this time," I rejoined.

"That is news such as the Master loved to tell me," exclaimed Murdo. "That old German cheat, he was always tacking, and light would be the breeze he couldn't sail with."

"He made for the wrong port that time," I explained, "for the Law Lords in London have given their verdict against him. His money is to be taken from him and given to the King."

"To King George!" cried Murdo, waving his crutch in triumph. "How much did you say it was?"

"Half a million pounds sterling," I replied.

"And how much is a half-million?"

"Five hundred thousand," I answered, "but it is difficult to grasp the meaning of figures when they mount up to millions. You can form some faint idea of a million if you ask how many days have passed since Jesus Christ was born."

"How many?" was the excited query of Murdo.

"About seven hundred thousand," I explained. "Not a million days yet!"

"And the King is to get the old fox's money," said Murdo. "Half a million, what a power of money. Well, all I can say is that the King

—blessings be on his head—deserves it. What does the Holy Book say: 'Blessed is he that considereth the poor.' Didn't I often say that by the old age pension the King was lending to the Lord? See now the interest that the Lord has paid him—five hundred thousand pounds."

"You are quite right, Murdo," I put in; "there never was so useful and blessed a thing as that pension."

"Ay, blessed indeed," went on Murdo, "and it isn't five shillings I get now but seven shillings and sixpence. But Mary is away over the ferry and money seemed to lose its value when Mary went. For Mary made the shilling go far, and the boll of meal I used to get for fifteen shillings now costs me forty-five shillings. If the blessed King only knew that! But how should he know? It is the Queen who looks after the meal and knows the price, and she has so much to think of with all the castles and palaces to keep in supplies and in order. She has not yet got an opportunity to tell the King the price of meal has gone up and up."

"It is very hard," I sympathised.

But Murdo suddenly brightened up.

"The old cheat's money," he cried out, "five hundred thousand pounds, and the King is to get it. That is the best news I have heard since the old Master passed over. Who knows but that the King will now be able to give us a little more and yet leave a little for himself."

## CAPTAIN SAMUEL NICOLSON

## § 1

IT IS A FAR CRY from the year 1881 to the year 1917. On a spring day in the latter year my telephone rang and I heard a voice: "I am Samuel Nicolson speaking from Glasgow." Now Samuel Nicolson is as common as blackberries in the Islands, and I did not at once recognise my boyhood friend; and besides, he was known to me as Sam the son of Ian (so the Gaelic usage requires).

"Yes," I replied, "but which Samuel Nicolson?"

Then the voice said in Gaelic: "Somharle Iain 'ic Shomharle."

"Oh, Sam," I exclaimed—the years blotted out in an instant—"where have you come from?"

"From New Zealand," replied Sam, "and I would much like to see you before I go back."

"Come along," said I, "and stay a night or two."

"Splendid," said Sam. "I have already looked up the trains to Edinburgh, and I'll arrive about four o'clock."

Now, thirty-six years do make a difference, and almost all I knew of him was that he had gone to sea, as he said he would when I read *Robinson Crusoe* to him. And I kept wondering for the next few hours what my guest would be like. No doubt Sam was visited by a similar wonder as he journeyed to Edinburgh.

At four o'clock the servant opened my study door and announced "Captain Nicolson." And in walked Sam in the uniform of a captain of the Royal Naval Reserve, with the stripes of his rank on the cuffs of his blue jacket and a ribbon on his breast.

"Norman, my hero, I am that glad to see you that I can scarcely speak," said Sam.

"And I am more delighted to see you than I can say," I answered. So we sat down looking at each other, two middle-aged men with greying hair, sundered by thirty-six years—but united by memories of boyish escapades.

"I have just come back from a visit to Skye," said Sam. "It is sadly changed. They seem to be all asleep there now."

"Nobody exploring caves there now, Sam," I said.

At that his eyes kindled with the keen look that sailors have from long gazing at far horizons.

"The cave!" exclaimed he. "I went specially to see it. And you can't believe, Norman, how small it has become."

"There's tea in the next room," I said, "come and have some," and I introduced Captain Nicolson to my household. In five minutes he was perfectly at home; in ten minutes the tea was almost forgotten as Sam told the story of how he sank a submarine.

"The torpedo passed a few yards behind the stern. I turned my ship and played him like a hawk a pigeon. At last I rammed him and he sank, sending up a huge pool of oil. It was great."

"That," said a lady visitor as I showed her out, "is the most interesting and charming man I have met for many a year."

## § 2

Two nights Sam stayed with us in Edinburgh and the days were too short for all the tales he had to tell. They were tales of adventures by land and sea and of hairbreadth escapes from death. Smitten by the fever of the sea, he had shipped as a sailor before the mast, and his first long voyage was to Australia. On his return to Glasgow he went to a navigation school and qualified for a mate's certificate. After saving a little more money he went back to the school and got his master's certificate.

His first command was a steam-yacht that served the mission stations in the Pacific. "When I was given the command of that ship," said Sam, "I thought that I was better fitted to be a buccaneer. But these missionaries made me think. They were clever and learned men, preachers and doctors and engineers; they could have secured any form of work, and five times the pay, at home, and there they were, devoting their lives to helping poor savages who are little removed from the beasts that perish. Some of them were going to leper-islands which they would never leave. And as I kept watch under the stars I would debate with myself: Why do they do it? And the gentlewomen, their wives, and the sweet-faced nurses, never so much as murmured at having left the comforts of life. The only explanation I could get at was that there must be something in religion which I have not understood."

At that he paused, and I saw that little missionary ship sailing under

the stars with Sam groping on deck after the great Unknown. Then suddenly he shot a question at me:

"Do you really believe in Christianity?"

"Yes, I do," I replied. "If I didn't, life would be meaningless."

"Why should it be meaningless without Christianity?" he asked.

"Well," I replied, rallying my faculties, "you came across the Pacific and through the Panama Canal and across the Atlantic, in command of a ship full of soldiers. But suppose you found yourself in mid-ocean without a compass or a chart and not even knowing what port you were sailing for, what would you say to that?"

"My position would be meaningless," replied Sam. "There would be no course but await rescue or sink the ship."

"That is the case with this little planet," I went on. "If its beginning was an accident, and if its end be to roll through space, a dead world revolving round a dying sun, it is meaningless."

"What meaning does religion give it?" queried Sam.

"Religion," I replied, "tells man that he is not sailing a blind, purposeless voyage. It tells of a Pilot at the helm; and of the port that awaits. It teaches that the world is a laboratory in which God is working out His purpose."

"Do tell me what the purpose is," exclaimed Sam.

"His purpose is to evolve perfect men and women, fashioned after the pattern of Jesus of Nazareth who said, 'I am among you as he that serveth.' That evolution goes on through death, for religion teaches that man is immortal. We cannot imagine God dwelling in the tombs of His own creation. He needs us as we need Him. We are religious because God is religious. It would be a lonely lot to be God with none to love Him, none to have fellowship with Him. Life is luminous with meaning as we see it in the light of immortality."

"I thought," protested Sam, "that evolution had proved that God is a back number."

"Evolution has only shown how life has developed, but it has nothing to say as to its origin. It explains how the clock works, but when one asks who put the clock there and who first swung the pendulum, evolution has nothing to say. To that religion answers: 'In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.'"

We had stumbled on the solemnities of life, and at that we fell silent for a space. Then Sam suddenly fell back on boyhood days.

"You remember that day when we were fishing," he began again, "and I told you how I was black-listed for whistling? I have had no use for religion since. The Bible is full of stories that are not only impossible but absurd. Take, for instance, the story of Jonah and the

whale. I have examined whales and no man could ever pass down a whale's gullet, and, if he did, he would be reduced to pulp in a few minutes. A religion that goes on teaching ridiculous things like that is a sheer deception."

At that I pulled myself together. "Now, Sam," said I, "I did not expect that you would fail to see that the book of *Jonah* is not history. The Jews thought themselves the favourites of heaven and despised all others. The man of genius, who wrote the book, set himself to show the Jews that they were wrong in their self-estimation. So he wrote a story about a Jew who was a mean coward, and who ran away from a difficult task. The pagan sailors who 'dug the sea' with the oars, trying to save him, were nobler than he. At last he goes to Nineveh and preaches doom, but the city repents and is saved. And *Jonah* is furious because God forgives."

I, at this, lifted a Bible from the desk and turned to the last chapter of *Jonah*, and asked Sam to listen:

But it displeased *Jonah* exceedingly, and he was very angry. . . . So *Jonah* went out of the city, and sat on the east side of the city, and there made him a booth. . . . And the Lord God prepared a gourd, and made it to come up over *Jonah*, that it might be a shadow over his head. . . . So *Jonah* was exceedingly glad of the gourd. But God prepared a worm . . . and it smote the gourd that it withered. And it came to pass, when the sun did arise, that God prepared a vehement east wind; and the sun beat upon the head of *Jonah*, that he fainted, and wished in himself to die, and said, It is better for me to die than to live.

And God said to *Jonah*, Doest thou well to be angry for the gourd? And he said, I do well to be angry, even unto death.

Then said the Lord, Thou hast had pity on the gourd, for the which thou hast not laboured, neither madest it grow; which came up in a night and perished in a night: and should not I spare Nineveh, that great city, wherein are more than sixscore thousand persons that cannot discern between their right hand and their left hand; and also much cattle.

There was silence for a minute while I replaced the book.

"That," I remarked, "is one of the most beautiful passages in all literature. The narrow-minded, self-centred Jew would destroy a whole city that his own prophecy might be verified; he was very anxious to keep the shade of the gourd for himself but utterly indifferent though thousands of children perished; in contrast to that repulsive figure the Love of God broods over the penitent city, far broader

than the measure of man's mind, casting its tenderness over even the cattle."

"Yes," admitted Sam, "it did end beautifully."

"However we brave it out," I quoted, "'we men are a small breed.' And Jonah was certainly among the smallest of the breed. But the multitudes that for centuries have read the beautiful parable and have pored over the whale, forgetting God, are even smaller than he."

At that Sam stirred in his chair. Evidently Jonah had got below the skin.

"You remember what it was like in the Island when we were boys," he pleaded. "Is it any wonder that I became a rebel and an unbeliever?"

"No," I answered, "I don't blame you in the least, I have been the same."

"I have often thought that these grim professors of religion were not Christians at all; zealous sectaries but not Christians."

"When one makes fine distinctions like that, there are but few Christians in the world."

"There was a grim old Scotswoman in Dunedin," went on Sam, pointing the moral, "who inherited a market-garden. She engaged a Chinaman to go round with a barrow selling her vegetables. 'Now, John,' said she to the Chinaman, 'if anyone asks you what Church you belong to, be sure and say Presbyterian, for so you will get far more customers.' So John practised the strange word on his tongue. But the question met him in an unexpected form. A severe Scot asked, 'John, are you a Christian?' to which he replied, 'Me no Cheestian, me Plesbyteesian.'"

In my turn, I sat up at that. "Many years ago," I countered, "I was travelling with a monk from Fort Augustus to Inverness, starting on the steamer at 6 a.m. To beguile the time the monk started a conversation, and we soon found ourselves dealing with serious matters. I told him that I had much sympathy with the Catholic Church, but that I had recently been reading Ranke's *History of the Popes*, and that, knowing the facts about the Borgias and others, I could not accept the doctrine of infallibility. 'Ah well,' said he, smiling gently, 'that's the very reason why I believe in infallibility; for a Church that could survive Popes like these must be infallible.'"

"That was a clever monk," exclaimed Sam. "Who was he?"

"He was," I replied, "Dom Maurus Caruana, a native of Malta who was educated in Scotland, learned Gælic at Fort Augustus, and was afterwards appointed Bishop of Malta and Archbishop of Rhodes."

He could preach with equal facility in four languages: English, Italian, Maltese, and Gaelic. But his Gaelic must have languished in Malta."

"An archbishop preaching Gaelic in Malta would be worth a day's journey to hear—" began Sam.

"The point is this, Sam," I interrupted; "a religion that survives the Borgias and the bigoted fanaticism of sectaries must be divine."

It was then that Sam made an unexpected request. "Have you a Gaelic Bible?" he asked.

From the bookcase I brought the big Gaelic Bible that I had used so frequently in Waternish and Glengarry.

"I would like to hear a chapter read just as the old Master used to read it on Sundays when we were allowed to speak our own language."

And I turned to St. Paul's hymn of love and explained to Sam that the Gaelic translation *love* was right and the English translation, *charity*, was wrong.

"That," exclaimed Sam, "is just what I love to hear: one up for Gaelic."

So, in the Mother-tongue, old and dear, I read:

Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels and have not *gradh* [love], I am become as a sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal. . . .

Sam and I, before I got to the words: "ach is e'n gradh a's mò dhiubh so" (but the greatest of these is love), were transported back to boyhood's days and heard again the old Master reading the magnificent words, with a mist on his eyes. Sam was no longer past the noon-tide, a captain in command of a transport; he was a little ragged boy, puzzling over the why's and wherefore's of the morning. The hard lines of authority on his face melted into a great tenderness. As we parted for the night he said:

"Norman, mo charaid (my friend), you and I have travelled a long road since that day we decided that it was our lot to be in hell together. Hell is gone; for the Love of God has quenched it. When you stopped reading that song of love, there came round my heart a feeling of sadness. I remembered that I had never been baptized."

"Baptism," I explained, "is but a symbol. When the love of God flows in on the heart like a tide, all symbols are submerged."

"Symbols are not, then, essential?" queried Sam.

"Useful, but not of the essence of the faith," I answered. "The great thing to remember is that so many keep the flame of God's love alight in a very narrow grate and not mistake the grate for the flame."



"That is a comfort," said Sam; "but there's something in the blood that makes me feel an outcast. . . . And a torpedo might quite well get me on the voyage back. . . ."

## § 3

ON the afternoon of his second day in Edinburgh I told Sam that I had to speak at a meeting in the City Chambers, and that if he cared to come I would introduce him to Sir John Lorne MacLeod, the Lord Provost, who was also a Highlander. "When I visit Dunedin," said Sam, "I would like to be able to tell them that I had a talk with the Lord Provost of the real Dunedin." So Sam came to the meeting and sat patiently through the usual routine. When it was at last ended, I brought him into the Lord Provost's room and introduced him. When the Lord Provost realised that Sam had brought a thousand New Zealanders through the Panama to fight for the Empire, and that he came from Skye, his cordiality knew no bounds. Cigars were produced, and in a few minutes Sam was telling of his encounter with the submarine in the Caribbean. It was curious to watch the Lord Provost falling under the spell of Sam's charm, just as my family was captivated by it; and as, so long, long ago, I fell under his spell as a boy. Charm is indefinable, but it is more captivating than intellect. When charm and will-power are combined, they are irresistible.

"I would like to visit New Zealand," said the Lord Provost, "for many of my kindred are there and in Australia. They went to Australia to dig gold and they remained to breed sheep."

"They chose the better part," responded Sam, "when they began sheep-farming. The sheep now carry the whole of Australia on their back."

"Isn't it the same in New Zealand?" asked the Provost.

"Much the same," said Sam. "We live largely by Canterbury lamb and such exports. . . . But what I wish to say to you, my lord, is this, that we in New Zealand are greatly in the debt of Edinburgh. It was the Free Church that organised in Edinburgh our very best immigrants, it was Edinburgh that gave its name to the city they founded. Their first idea was to call it 'New Edinburgh.'"

"That would have been a mistake," exclaimed the Lord Provost; "'New York' is not commendable, though it has only two syllables; but New Edinburgh would have five syllables. The best names are of only one syllable or two or at most three. The finest of all are Rome with one and London with two."

"It was an Edinburgh man called Chambers who saved us," explained Sam. "He wrote out that Dunedin, the Gaelic name of Edinburgh, was hundreds of years older than the English name; and Dunedin the city became. And for Presbyterians and Sabbatarians you will think yourself in Edinburgh when you come and visit us."

"Chambers," echoed the Lord Provost; "he was doubtless Chambers the founder of *Chambers's Journal*."

"Yes, the very man," said Sam, "and he saved us from a name that would have been a second cousin of New York."

## § 4

THE Lord Provost had another engagement, otherwise he would have listened to Sam for hours. So Sam and I set out down the Mound. When we reached the spot where Sir Walter Scott, returning from the Parliament House, stopped every clear day to admire the view, I halted. "Here," said I, "Sir Walter Scott used to stop and look from the heart of the city at the hills and the sea and marvel at the beauty of the world."

Sam looked at the line of Princes Street, at the hills of Fife, at the Forth, and at the North Sea.

"Marvellous!" said he. "It is worth coming back all the way from New Zealand to see this alone. Now that ship down there, where will she be bound for?"

"Norway or the Baltic," I answered.

"Oh, of course," answered Sam, "the Baltic: I would like to see these ports. But nobody can see everything."

At last we resumed the descent. When we got to the National Gallery, Sam stopped.

"Do tell me more about the Lord Provost," he said. "They will be interested in Dunedin to hear about him. Does he really speak good Gaelic?"

"Yes," I answered, "he really speaks excellent Gaelic. He was brought up in Tobermory and in Lochmaddy. His father fought in the Crimean War, and as Lord Provost he is now Admiral of the Forth. He is really at heart more a soldier than a Lord Provost."

"Marvellous!" exclaimed Sam. "Admiral of the Forth! There's a title for you. They have nothing like that in New Zealand. But isn't it strange: there were the Lord Provost, you, and I, in the City, Chambers—and all three Gaelic speakers in this city of the Sassenachs."

"No, Sam," I replied, "there is nothing marvellous about that."

Let me put a problem to you. If two families, speaking different languages, and knowing nothing of each other's language, were wrecked on a desert island in the South Pacific—"

"Desert islands in the South Pacific are as plentiful as herring in the Minch," interrupted Sam. "To be wrecked there is the easiest thing in the world."

"Yes," I resumed, "that is so, to judge by the map."

"Your maps," snorted Sam, "know nothing about it. They are so numerous that you have to be wide awake not to find yourself stuck on a coral reef before you can say Jack Robinson."

"Well, of course," I protested, "but how many desert islands there may be in the Pacific has nothing to do with my problem. The problem is this—if after fifty years you discovered that island, which language would the descendants of the clever family and the stupid family be speaking?"

"The language of the clever family," answered Sam instantly.

"No, you are quite wrong," I countered, "for the clever family would have no difficulty in learning the language of the stupid family, while the stupid family could never learn the language of the clever family."

Sam stood quite still for half a minute on the steps of the Gallery while the tide of traffic ebbed and flowed and roared along the broad street. Then he burst out laughing. And he laughed so heartily that the passers-by glanced at him.

"That explains it," he chuckled. "I see it all. Won't I tell that to the Caledonian Society in the other Dunedin when I return. They will understand then how the Gaels come to fill the high places in the Dominions. By their very cleverness they lose their language but gain the world."

"Yes, that explains a great deal," said I, moving westward towards the University Club. For I really wanted to get Sam inside four walls before he had another spasm of illumination.

Then it was that Sam gave vent to his emotion in the mother-tongue, old and dear:

"Thormoid, a ghraidh," *ars esan* (said he), "*nach sinn fein na se oid*" (Norman, my beloved, aren't we the clever ones).

After the War Sam was appointed Harbour-Master of New Zealand's capital. He wrote me shortly before he died: "I would give anything in the world for an evening's fishing round the Sgeir Dhubh (the Black Rock)."

## THE END OF IT ALL

## § I

THE LAST EVENING I passed with Murdo was in the summer before he passed on to Tir nan Og, far away beyond our horizon. He was sitting at his door watching the sea and sky. When I think of Murdo and Mary and hundreds such whom I have known, the thought comes fluttering to the mind like a white dove from heaven, how lovely a thing death is. For death is the great reuniter, and when Murdo crossed over and found Mary waiting for him a year would not be long enough for all the joyous news. And Ronald who died at the Somme with a bullet through his brain, what a rapture for Murdo meeting him again. Murdo looked forward to that with ever increasing interest as the months passed. "The Creator who placed me here in this beautiful world," he would say, "is One to be trusted. Having loaded me with beauty and mercy all my life, He will not at the end desert me." Murdo was a nature-worshipper at heart. A shaft of golden light suddenly breaking through the clouds and making a silvery pool on the Sound of Raasay was to him the assurance that the Creator meant good by him, and that He was not done with His poor son, Murdo, quite yet.

He was still amazingly alert that lovely summer, though restricted by his crippled limbs. "That old Kaiser made a prisoner of me for life," said he, "but he is now a prisoner himself in a strange land while I am at home in my own country—so I am better off than he. He, moreover, fell from a great height, while I am on the same level: so he is much worse off. When I think of all he must have suffered and all he lost, I can find it in my heart to forgive him. It was a curious thing that Ronald, when he came home after his first wound, did not hate the Germans. Can you explain that?"

"I can understand it, but that is different from explaining it; as the saint said when someone asked him 'What is God?' 'When you do not ask me I know,' he replied. You see, Ronald and the German opposite him were both brave men, and soldiers admire courage. They were both in the same peril—under the very shadow of death;

they were both paying the price of the world's crimes: all that made them feel a brotherhood in pain. I am sure Ronald was right in not hating the Germans."

"Thank you," said Murdo, "I shall end my days like Ronald; I won't hate the Kaiser any more."

## § 2

IT WAS when we spoke of the brave days of old—of the Battle of the Braes and all that came of it—that Murdo brightened up. I asked him if he remembered saying to my father that the golden age would come back again when they got Ben Lee, and that a whole community of skilled craftsmen would spring up; that their sons and daughters would no longer need to search for a living in Glasgow and Greenock.

"Yes, I remember that, and much else," he replied, "but things have not turned out as we expected. It is very strange how when you are dead certain of anything in this world it is the very opposite that turns up."

"There were two shoemakers in the Braes not so long ago," I said; "how many are there now?"

"There's none now," answered Murdo; "nowadays if you want a boot patched you must walk seven miles to Portree."

"There was a good tailor," I went on, "and I remember the amazement of the folk when he got a sewing-machine. They thought it the greatest miracle of the age."

"So they did; quite a nine days' wonder; but there is no tailor now."

"There was a boatbuilder and a joiner."

"There is neither the one nor the other now."

"There was a good weaver. I remember watching him at the loom long ago and thinking how quick and steady his hands were."

"There is no weaver now; the weaver died and the loom was burnt one winter when the peats were wet."

"There were three or more herring-fishing boats in each township; probably twenty in all. What has become of them?"

"They are rotting on the shores; for there are no men to work them. Often from my door I see the fish shoaling in the Sound—herring and mackerel—but no boat sets out and no nets are cast. The boats and the nets have alike rotted."

And Murdo cast a glance over the Sound of Raasay, and from Ben Dianaveg in the North, to Scalpay in the south-east, but no sail

gleamed in the sunshine. Over all lay the imploring beauty of decay. The sea was a tessellated pavement. Its emptiness chilled the heart—emptiness and beauty in a tragic embrace.

## § 3

"YOU remember old Chirsty who lived below high-water mark at the head of the bay?" I asked Murdo after a pause.

"Well that," answered Murdo. "Nobody who ever saw Chirsty would forget her. She was the wisest woman in all the Island, and many a person did she cure with her herbs and her lotions. If she had been alive now, she would have healed my bones."

"Is there anyone in the Braes now who knows the healing properties of plants?"

"Nobody in all the Braes knows even their Gaelic names, far less their powers of healing. The schoolmasters now are so busy teaching the children about Napoleon Buonaparte and the height of mountains in the Himalayas that they never so much as mention the Tri-bhileach (Bog-bean). That reminds me how Mary, not feeling very well, consulted a preacher about her state. He looked at her tongue and said, 'Toisich air ol sugh na tri-bhileach' (Begin to drink the juice of the Bog-bean.) It was his remedy for all ailments, but Chirsty had its own remedy for every ailment. She was the last of her race and the knowledge was buried in her grave.

"The doctors of today doubtless have other remedies."

"Other remedies," repeated Murdo with scorn; "all they will say is 'Stop drinking black tea,' as if tea were any use whatever unless it stained the cup; or 'Take a couple of pills,' they will say—pills which came out of a factory and were made of some dirt or other. That's all they do." And Murdo cleared his throat and spat out his disgust. "Now Chirsty would make a brew that cleared you up in a day and a night. But Chirsty is gone."

"Once when I was a little boy I was sent in haste to get help from Chirsty for old Granny in the Cot-house, and Chirsty filled a bottle with the juice of dulse and carrigen, and the old woman got relief at once when she drank it. And only the other day I read in a newspaper how a clever doctor in Harley Street is now using that same remedy for the heart—medicines compounded of dulse and carrigen."

At that Murdo got so excited that he waved his crutch.

"I knew that Chirsty was the cleverest physician in the Island," he exclaimed, "and now the clever doctors in London have copied her treatment. There is nobody like Chirsty now left in the Island."

"Things evidently are going from bad to worse," I said, not daring to speak cheerfully in so sinister a situation.

§ 4

"THE worst of all is this," went on Murdo, "that children have ceased to be born."

"There are children in the Braes still," I replied. "I met two on the road when I was coming to see you."

"Two or three," said Murdo with scorn. "In the old days, when you were young, you would have met them by scores. How many children were there in the two schools in your young days?"

"At least a hundred and fifty, at most a hundred and sixty," I replied.

"Today in all Braes there are only twenty-eight school-children," said Murdo weighing each word with great solemnity. "No race in all the world ever died out so rapidly as the people of the Braes are dying out. In another generation they will be all gone and nothing to show for them but totichean lan de gheantaig" (ruined walls filled with nettles).

"You don't say, Murdo," I remonstrated, "that that is going to be the end of all the struggling and the fighting. Is the Battle of the Braes to have so disastrous an end as that?"

"It was not the agitation for our rights or the Battle of the Braes that brought the childless houses. It was quite a different thing. What did it was the old age pensions. When Mary and I got the pension we thought the millennium had come, and my only fear was that the good King could not keep his feet with all that money going out; but it wasn't the King that suffered, and his purse remained full for God saw to that; for what does the Holy Book say, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.' But if the good King's purse continued full, the cradles soon began to empty, until the Braes are now left without the shouting of children at play."

"Murdo, you have often surprised me; but this is the greatest surprise of all. What possible connection can there be between the old age pension and the childless homes of the Braes?"

"It is amazing to me how blind clever men can be," said Murdo, smiling genially, "and I suppose you must be clever or Dunedin would never have made you a doctor, and when that happened I said to Angus MacBhannain that Dunedin had done honour to the Braes. Now, being a doctor, you will be able to tell me what I should do to get back the use of my legs."

"I don't know anything about that kind of doctoring," I explained. "A doctor of medicine is quite different from a doctor of divinity or a doctor of laws. I am no use whatever when it comes to broken bones."

"Well, well," resumed Murdo, "it seems to me that you, though a clever man as you must be, know less than old Chirsty. If only she were alive. . . ."

"Old Chirsty knew far more and could do far more than, I can."

"And old Chirsty never was near the college at Dunedin. Well, well, now you might explain why Dunedin made you a doctor when you cannot heal and cannot explain why the King with his old age pensions caused almost all the cradles in the Braes to be burnt on the fire after the summer when the peats never got dry."

"The doctors of divinity," I humbly explained, "were the scholars who decided about medicine for the soul. There is a beautiful room in Rome, and when the guide shows it to the tourists he explains that that is the room where the doctors of divinity have debated for a thousand years. And an American, when he heard that, said, 'And pray, sir, what have they settled?'"

"They would be discussing the right and true principles," Murdo rejoined, "for without the right principles everything a man does is like the apples of Sodom—rotten at the core."

But often before I had heard Murdo on the principles which cause churches to be rent to the glory of God, and I hastily changed the subject.

"Murdo," I interrupted, "what about the empty cradles in the Braes? The King has a great deal on his mind, and I hope that the dying out of the good people in Braes won't add to his trials."

"The King, God preserve and bless him," explained Murdo, "did what was most generous and noble and what one would expect from so great a King. But there is a lot of power in the hands of the Bradein Dubh. He, the old Satan, takes the good a man does and twists it into evil, turning a blessing into a curse."

"How could he turn the greatest act of Christian benevolence into a curse? It is impossible."

"That is just where book-learning is no use compared with observation," explained Murdo. "Now, you are full of book-learning and I never read a book in my life, but I have kept my eyes open and my ears open, and I find that I can give knowledge to doctors and professors from Dunedin. What a strange world this is!"

Murdo, at this, began the long and delicate process of filling his pipe, so that I almost despaired of hearing the explanation. I think



the way he played with the dottle, laying it gently on the top of the tobacco and adjusting it artfully round the rim, was just a superbly clever exhibition of the actor's pause before the climax. I had matches and lit his pipe and waited patiently. With that panorama of mountain and sea and headland and bays stretched out before the eye, it was no hardship to wait.

"It is certain that not even the wisest can see all the results of his acts beforehand," resumed Murdo, "and I am ashamed when I think how blind I was myself to the curse the pension was to bring. You remember, in your young days, how every house in Braes, except the bachelors' and old maids' cot-houses, had three generations living in them. For as soon as a man and his wife felt their strength failing they told a son to bring a wife home. And thus you had the grandparents, the son and his wife, and the grandchildren under the one roof."

"I remember that was the general rule," I assented, "and I remember what Ian Dubh said when my father asked him how he was getting on: 'Splendidly,' said Ian, 'I am paying off old debts; I am honestly paying my way, and I am putting lots of money in the bank.'"

Murdo chuckled.

"Yes," said he, "he was supporting his father and mother, and at that time he had six children, a very paying bank they proved to Ian Dubh. But today no ageing couple ever asks a son to bring home a wife. Why should they? Between them they have one pound sterling a week coming in and scarcely anything going out. You remember the story you wrote about me in the *Scotsman*, how I said that the Queen had not yet told the blessed King about the price of meal and how difficult life had become for his poor pensioners."

"I remember it perfectly," I replied, "and the Editor told me he had a letter from Balmoral asking more copies to be sent."

At that Murdo waved his crutch in the air.

"After that," he exclaimed, "the beautiful Queen found time to tell the King the price of the boll of meal and the King (may the Holy One reward him) raised the pension to ten shillings a week. It's a marvel what the *Scotsman* can bring about. By that time I could no longer go down the brae, and the Master could not come up because his breath was failing him: but he gave that *Scotsman* to Ian Alick, the cleverest student the Island ever sent to Glasgow (when I say that, I am speaking only of those who went to Glasgow), and told him to read the story to me. Clever and all though Ian Alick is, his Gaelic was not so beautiful as the Master's. There never was a word in the *Scotsman* but the Master could put into lovely

Gaelic. But Ian did his best, and he and I had a great time over that story. 'Murdo,' said Ian to me, 'you will be famous now throughout the Kingdom for giving advice to the King and telling him what to do.' 'Ian,' said I, 'I composed over eighty songs in Gaelic—the oldest and most beautiful language in the world—I don't need an English newspaper in Dunedin to make my name for me.'"

"The Queen," I put in, "laughed heartily over that story; and she got copies too."

"And I never learned to write," exclaimed Murdo, "yet I have told the *Scotsman* what should be done, and the King has listened to me: amn't I the man!"

"Let us get back to the question of the children," I interrupted.

"That is the point," said Murdo. "Think of it yourself. When the ageing couple thus found life made easy and comfortable for them by the generous King, why should they give up their freedom and the mastery of their home to a stranger? Look at my own case. I had twelve children, and no son's wife will ever be the mistress of my house. There was one case in the Island. A son brought home a wife, thinking that the old order still continued, and the old couple put her out at the door. A sad case that was! And no son in the Braes ever repeated that experiment. The sons now go to the trams in Glasgow or to the police in Greenock or Edinburgh, and the Braes are left with nothing but old men and women tottering towards the grave."

"Of course that is the explanation," I agreed. "How stupid of me not to have thought of that!"

## § 5

"THERE is more than that," went on Murdo, "for the old age pension (and never a day passes but I ask God, the Giver of all, to bless and keep His anointed, the most generous King who ever wore a crown, and who is in no wise to blame because Bradein Dubh has turned his bounty into an impoverishment) won't keep the old folk alive for ever, and the croft passes to a son who comes back with a wife from Glasgow and takes over the old home and the stock. But does that son do as his fathers did, raise up sons and daughters to support the nation in the day of need? Not he! There isn't a poisonous and wicked practice in Glasgow which that son has not learnt. Why is it that the knowledge of evil passes so quickly from house to house and from woman to woman, while the knowledge of good and holy ways spreads so slowly? Perhaps you from Dunedin can explain that with all your book-knowledge?"

"There is only one explanation," I replied, "and that is that the heart of man is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked. The learned men now tell us, moreover, that man, as an animal, goes back for six hundred thousand years, while man as a Christian is only a little over nineteen hundred years. You can see for yourself that six hundred thousand years must be more powerful than nineteen hundred years. What appeals to man as an animal wins therefore far quicker than what appeals to him as a spiritual being—as the heir of God."

"Now I understand," commented Murdo. "It is what the holy apostle meant when he wrote: 'The flesh warreth against the spirit.' And the flesh had a long start, if the learned men are right."

"As for that, they are doubtless right, though they contradict each other just as if they were preachers, some saying that man is a hundred thousand years old and some four hundred thousand and so on. It is just guessing—but there is some truth in it."

"At any rate," went on Murdo, "our young men when they go to Glasgow very soon learn all the wicked ways and very little of the good. And when any of them come back, they live like the sinners in Glasgow. And they never have more than two or three children—three at the most, and frequently only one. It is the same all over the Kingdom, they tell me. The good King will be left without men to fight his battles, and he who lives longest will see what will come of that in the end. But that is how the hundred and fifty scholars in the Braes have now become only twenty-eight.<sup>1</sup> There cannot be a worse example of godless living in all the Three Kingdoms than that. The King's pension did the most of the evil, and the wickedness of the big towns the rest."

"It is far worse than it appears," I commented, "for the geniuses, the inventors, the great spiritual teachers and the great soldiers were all born near the end of big families and not near the beginning. As there are no big families now, there will naturally be in the future no geniuses and no great men to enrich the world."

"Is that really proved?" asked Murdo, with kindling interest.

"As proved as anything can be in this uncertain world," I replied: "the greatest religious leader in the eighteenth century was John Wesley, and he was the fifteenth child, and his brother Charles, the greatest of hymn-writers, the eighteenth child, of their parents."

"That beats me completely," cried Murdo. "I had only twelve."

"The greatest of Scottish writers, Walter Scott, was the ninth child of his parents; and if yesterday had been as today, men such as

<sup>1</sup> In this year of grace, 1944, the number of scholars in the Braes has come down to 18.

Wellington, Nelson, Gladstone, and Napoleon would never have been born."

"No great loss if Napoleon hadn't been born," Murdo broke in, "but Gladstone, we would have been yet at the mercy of factors were it not for Gladstone."

"In future the world will be a poor place," said I, "inhabited by a commonplace race without genius, without poetry, without vision, and without leaders who can lead."

"Don't say that," exclaimed Murdo. "Remember I am a bard."

"I am speaking of the days when we shall have passed over to the other side."

"I have been thinking of my own family," went on Murdo, "and what you say is true right enough. I had twelve children, and as the family increased the quality improved. They were all good children and great fighters. None of them ever let the flies rest on them. But the one who did most for Mary and me was Alasdair. Alasdair prospered greatly in Newcastle. When it came to buying or selling, the English were no match for Alasdair. Now, Alasdair was the ninth child of the family. And it was Alasdair who built the new house for us. If we had stopped at the eighth child we would never have built the new house. What you say is God's own truth. The best come towards the end."

"Well, Murdo," I said, "think of all the families in the Three Kingdoms stopping at two or three! What will the nation be like sixty years after this?"

"It will be like my croft in a bad harvest—a stook here and a stook there, and the quality so bad that it is scarcely worth putting into the barn."

"Intellectually and spiritually and ethically it will be an impoverished and a servile race," I summed up.

"Alas, alas!" sighed Murdo, "it is of the bountiful King I am thinking. Who will be left to fight for him when the enemy comes in like a flood or flying like the seagulls after herring? As the old proverb says, 'Far nach bi na mic-uchd, cha bhi na fir fheachd' (Where there are no boys at the breast there will be no warriors in the field).

## § 6

THEN another thought came to Murdo and he waved his crutch in the air.

"There is something that can be said on the other side of the question," he exclaimed. "If I had not had a ninth child, the new



house would never have been built and I would not have been on the roof of that new house, making repairs, and I would not have fallen and broken my leg. Nobody would ever have fallen off the roof of the old house, but the roof of the new house is as slippery as ice. You can't settle a question such as that with book-learning. Were it not for my ninth child I would have been walking the hills as light-footed as ever. You see the strangeness of the world we live in. The King's pension emptied the cradles in the Braes; and my ninth child made me a cripple. Nobody can tell what will come out of anything in the latter end."

"You forget, Murdo," I said, "that you told me it was the Kaiser, not Alasdair, who was the cause of your breaking your legs."

"That is true, too," said Murdo, "for Alasdair, my ninth child, is the best son a father ever had."

## § 7

As we were parting a shadow seemed to flicker over Murdo's lined face. "I have a feeling," said he, "that I won't be here when you return next year, for the time has come for me to go after the others. A longing comes over me now to see what is on the other side of the 'bealach.' Perhaps I shall overtake the Master and that there will be a *Scotsman* there also which he will put into the Gaelic for me."

"He will be there to welcome you: the Book says so," I interjected.

"That is so," went on Murdo, "but I fear me the Master will be too high up for me, 'oir cha robh duine anus an eilean a chumadh la na sabaid cho naomh' (for there was none in the Island who kept the Sabbath so holy)."

"You were very careful yourself also," I said.

"So I was," concluded Murdo; "I have some hope, for I never did a hand's turn on the Sabbath."

"Chaochail Murachidh (Murdo has been changed)," I was told the following year. The beautiful thing in our Island is that nobody ever dies in it. They are translated.